

A TOUCH OF GLASS

IS HP'S ENVY 14 SPECTRE
AN ULTRABOOK WORTH
BREAKING THE BANK FOR?



GAME THREE WAYS

As **Nintendo**, **Sony** and
Microsoft take on the
portable gaming market,
who will come out on top?

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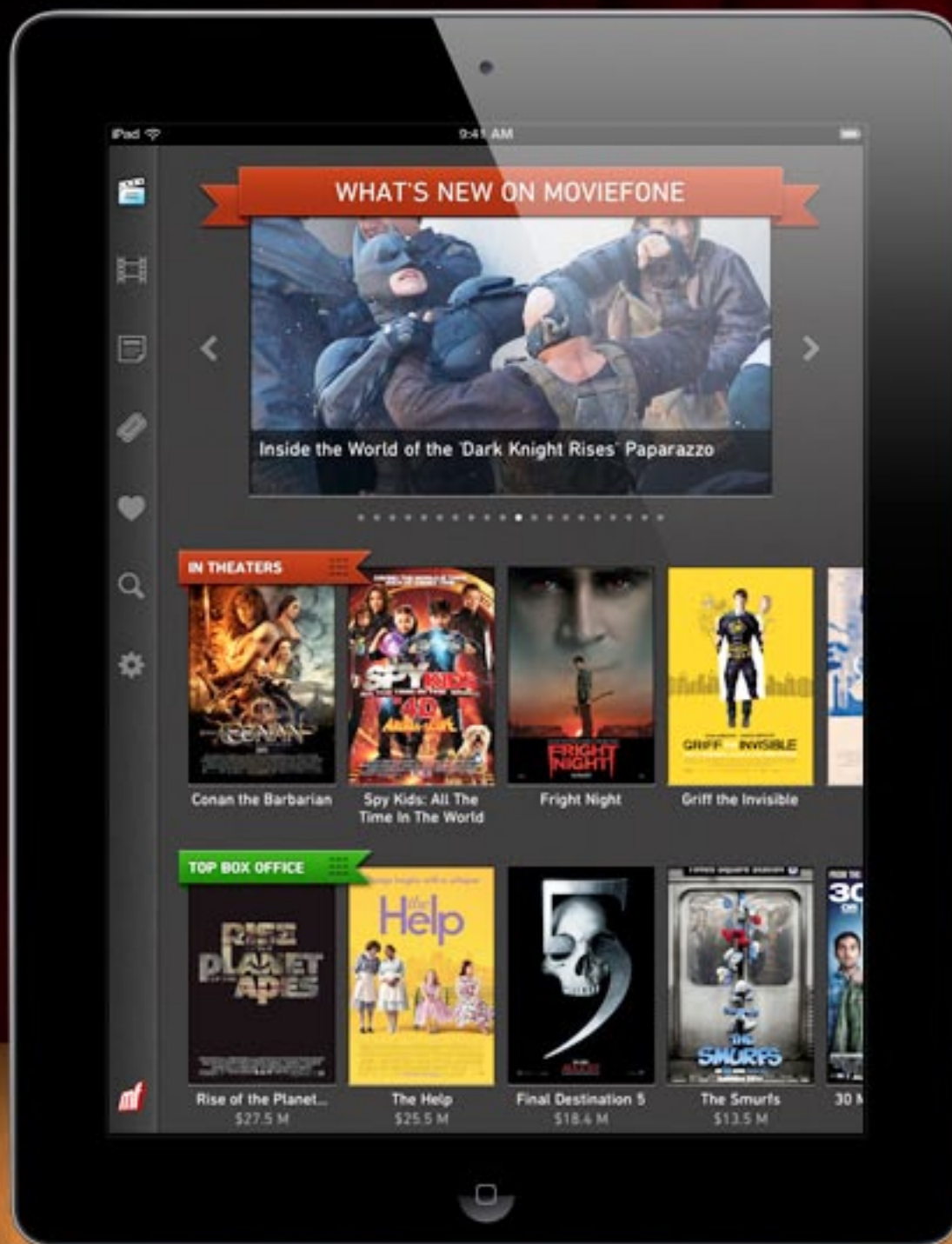
Q&A WITH TANGO'S ERIC SETTON

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HTC'S SENSE UI 3.6
SONY'S XPERIA S

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Editor's Letter

Well, it's time. The new iPad is here. Of course we talked quite a bit about it last week and surely a lucky few of you are reading this right now on your new, higher-resolution device. If that's you, greetings from a land of high definition. If that isn't you, perhaps you're hoping to read our take on the thing before making the plunge. For that you'll have to wait for the next issue, which will feature our full review of the new iPad.

Or, of course, you could always visit www.engadget.com and read it the old-fashioned way.

Outside of the launch of that new slate, some of the biggest news this week wasn't what Apple has done but rather what it *hasn't*. Gartner ranked Samsung as China's number one smartphone maker, with Nokia, Huawei and ZTE all ranking ahead of Apple. The iPhone 4S is listed as a highly desired device, but it isn't compatible with China Mobile's TD-SCDMA network, the nation's most popular.

How much is this going to hurt the Cupertino-based company in what will soon become the world's largest smartphone market? That remains to be seen and, with Chinese officials indicating there might not be a major LTE rollout for another two years, Apple might



need to add yet another flavor to its iPhone offerings before it becomes a truly major player across Asia.

While we're talking metrics, we should mention that Nielsen released its latest figures on videogame adoption in the home. Predictably there's more gaming going on than ever, with 56 percent of US households having at least one modern gaming

console (Xbox 360, PS3, etc.). That's a massive rise of six percent in just a year, but even more impressive is the seven percent rise in average time spent gaming if you factor in mobile gaming on tablets and the like. Our nation may be getting fatter, but damned if we don't play a mean game of *Angry Birds*.

Speaking of, we got our first hands-on time with the long-awaited successor to that mobile blockbuster. It's called *Angry Birds Space* and with a name like that you won't be left wondering just where it takes you. Much like *Super Mario Galaxy* elevated our favorite plumber onto ridiculously small planets with ridiculously high gravitational fields, *Space* takes our favorite spherical avian projectiles to a place where their non-aerodynamic profiles are no longer a hindrance. You'll now be able to sling birds through multiple gravitational fields toward otherworldly pigs located on other astral bodies. I'm only a little ashamed to admit that I'm really looking forward to playing this myself. Not long



**You'll now
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birds through
multiple
gravitational
fields towards
otherworldly
pigs...**



to wait with a launch on March 22nd and, if you play it on the Galaxy Note, you'll get yourself an exclusive bonus level. Probably a big one.


Amazon this week made one of the biggest additions to its Prime video service since launch, partnering with Discovery to add 17,000 titles to those currently streaming. Some of them are actually vaguely educational.

We got a stronger indication this week that Apple is looking to get more serious about a premium video service of its own, something that would presumably augment its Apple TV device and a future TV with an Apple logo on it. Leslie Moonves said that Steve Jobs reached out to him personally, but the CBS CEO wasn't interested in signing over his company's content, saying: "You know more than me about 99 percent of things, but I know more about the television business." We're guessing some similar things were said to Mr. Jobs about the cellphone business in the mid-Naughties.

Finally, in an interesting twist former Sony executive Phil Harrison has turned his coat and

will now be working for Microsoft. He's joining the Interactive Entertainment Business team, focusing on bolstering the company's growth in Europe. This comes just a week after the legendary Peter Molyneux stepped away, leaving the position of Creative Director at Microsoft Studios Europe vacant. That position, we're told, has yet to be filled. Presumably they're waiting for the right candidate with a long resume full of violence toward innocent chickens.

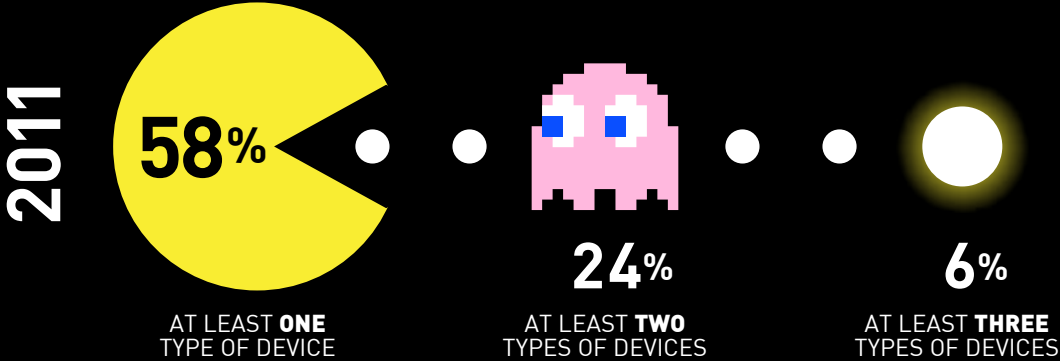
In this week's Distro we're featuring Dana Wollman's take on HP's glass-clad little laptop with a premium price, the Envy 14 Spectre. Sean Buckley reports in from GDC on how Sony, Nintendo and Microsoft are dealing with the mobile gaming menace.

Sharif Sakr evaluates the Sony Xperia S, Brad Molen gives us a sneak preview of HTC's Sense 3.6, Ross Rubin talks about expanding the functionality of our gadgets in new and exciting ways, plus we have more Recommended Reading and a new IRL for you. Finally, Tango's Eric Setton takes a turn at Q&A before Box Brown caps things off with another great comic. If you have a new device this will be a great opportunity to get familiar with it. If it's something older, maybe you should take this chance to give it just a little extra love. 

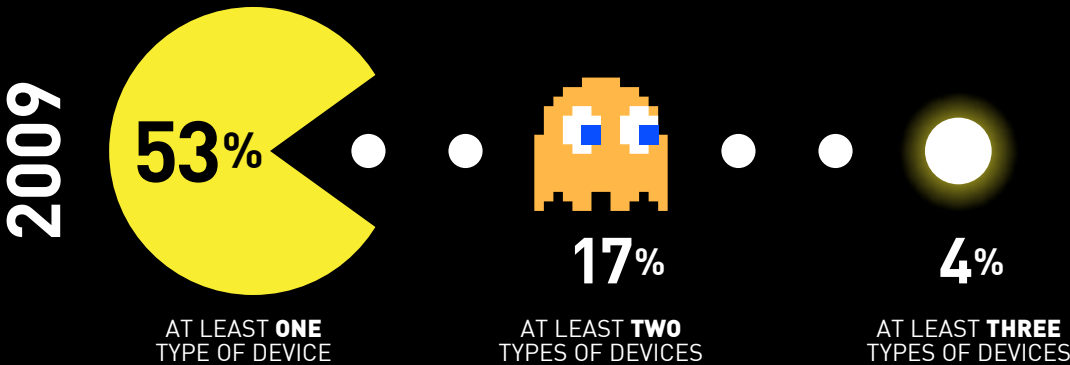
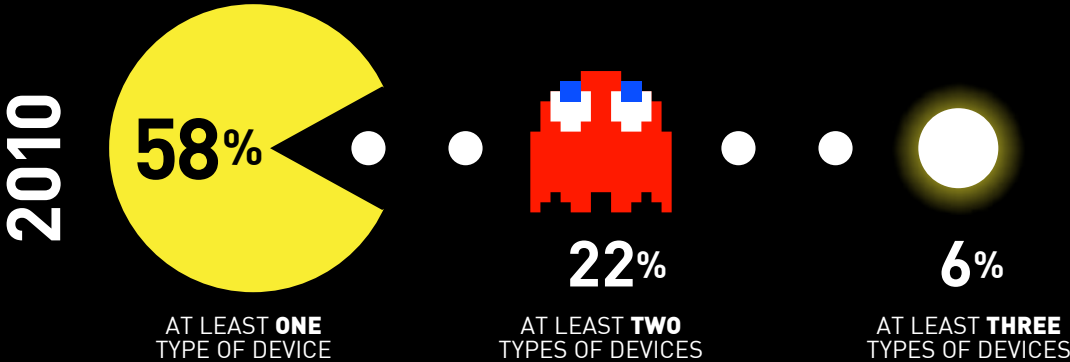
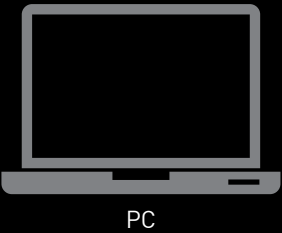
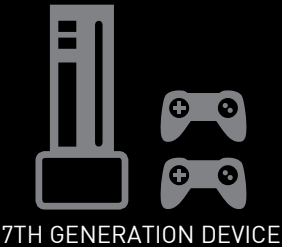
TIM STEVENS
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF,
ENGADGET

Cross-Platform Gaming on the Rise in the U.S.

Nielsen is out with its annual survey of video game use in the US today, and it's found that gaming continues to be on the rise across the board. That includes a seven percent increase in total gaming time compared to the previous year (due largely to increases in mobile and tablet gaming), and an increase in modern console ownership from 50 percent of households to 56 percent; including so-called 7th generation consoles like the Wii, Xbox 360 and PlayStation 3. It also found the number of cross-platform gamers to be on the upswing, with 24 percent responding that they play on two or more of a console, PC, tablet or mobile device (up from 17 percent). In mobile gaming, specifically, Nieslen found that while iOS gaming tended to be distributed fairly evenly across all age groups, Android gaming proved to be far more popular among those aged 25-34 than any other group. — Donald Melanson



TYPES OF DEVICES



SOURCE: NIELSEN

The Weekly Stat

EXTRA SENSORY PERCEPTION

Switched On**BY ROSS RUBIN**

Ross Rubin (@rossrubin) is executive director and principal analyst of the NPD Connected Intelligence service at The NPD Group. Views expressed in Switched On are his own.

At Intel's CES 2012 press conference, the giant chipmaker justified calling thin notebook PCs "Ultrabooks" by focusing on how the devices would increasingly be characterized by more than their thinness. Most of that differentiation was based on plans to integrate the kinds of sensors that have become commonplace in smartphones and tablets; sensors that can detect location, motion, orientation and proximity. The integration of sensors has become so core to the modern smartphone experience that their absence would make using such devices untenable. Imagine if we had to

manually reorient a display every time we wanted to play a game or take a photo, or if we had to avoid activating a button with our cheeks when holding a phone against them.

But, what is a limitation of form factor today may not hold true tomorrow. Already, of course, smartphones can tap into remote intelligence for applications such as remote camera viewing or unlocking of doors via services from home security companies such as ADT and Vivint. From around the world, you can even remotely start a vehicle using the Viper SmartStart app. But there are increasing

opportunities for smartphones to act on information from sensors that are not embedded into their shells.

One of the best opportunities is in the vehicle: a four-wheeled sensor brigade that includes information on everything from speed to tire pressure. As car manufacturers build out APIs, smartphones will be able to tap into their native sensors. For example, a future smartphone app could issue warnings to slow down when you are driving too close to the car in front of you, alert you when you're drifting into the next lane or even call a trusted friend or relative if you are driving erratically.

Beyond that, though, connectivity-enhanced sensors can be used for a whole range


of activities. Want to know when a front door is opened? When a car pulls up in a driveway? When the temperature in a child's room gets too cold or too hot? When something is placed in a physical inbox at work? In the past few months, at least three separate Kickstarter projects have been funded to create devices that can detect.

The first, TWINE, includes an accelerometer and temperature sensor; a simple Web app lets users create simple actions such as sending a tweet or SMS when the sensor is triggered. The second, Ninja Blocks, has taken things a bit farther with a two-way bridge that can also receive information from key web services as well as creating additional sensors for light, humidity, distance, motion and even a push button.

The most recent, Node, which is still in the funding stage, boasts the most polished industrial design. A cylindrical core of sensors, including a gyroscope, magnetometer and accelerometer, can be topped off by any number of caps that can include a ring of LEDs for use as a flashlight, an infrared thermometer, a radiation sensor and a range of gas sensors that can detect and measure carbon monoxide, carbon dioxide, chlorine, nitric oxide, hydrogen and sulfur dioxide.

Clearly, sensor input detection will be met with a broad range of reactions in terms of mainstream interest. One factor that may hold back these extended outposts, though, is connectivity. While attaching to WiFi is a simple path, con-

**What is a
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sumers may want to have sensors in places where there is no access to WiFi. The best prospect seems to be a shared cellular data plan, where the very lightweight demands of sensors would barely be noticed compared to delivering high-definition video to a tablet, for example. Perhaps there's an opportunity for the paging networks to not only have another day in the sun, but also help relay how warm it is outside. 

Sir Jonathan Ive: The iMan Cometh



Interviewed by
Mark Prigg
*London Evening
Standard*

Like most top Apple execs, Jonathan Ive (now Sir Ive) isn't known for sitting down for a lot of interviews. He did recently speak to the *London Evening Standard*, though, and talked a bit about the design process at Apple, and how it differs from its competitors. On that point, Ive says that what drives Apple is a "sincere, genuine appetite to do something that is better," while he sees other companies as only wanting to do something different or "appear new."

AROUND THE WEB

For Tablet Computer Visionary Roger Fidler, A Lot of What-ifs

by Michael S.
Rosenwald

The Washington Post



Roger Fidler is hardly a household name even among those in the tech industry, but he was at the forefront of one of today's biggest shifts in computing: the tablet. *The Washington Post* recently caught up with him to discuss the tablet he envisioned in 1994 and how he may have done things differently in hindsight.

Hacker, Informant and Party Boy of the Projects

by N.R. Kleinfield and
Somini Sengupta

The New York Times



When news of the LulzSec arrests broke last week, attention quickly turned to group-leader-turned-FBI-informant Hector Xavier Monsegur, otherwise known as "Sabu." Here, *The New York Times* offers one of the most extensive profiles of the man to date, detailing the life he lived until he got caught.

How Three Germans Are Cloning the Web

by Caroline Winter

*Bloomberg
Businessweek*



It's not just products that are knocked-off as soon as they become popular. As *Businessweek* recently reported, websites are bigger targets than ever for imitators — particularly in Germany, where a company founded by three brothers has made what some estimate to be a billion dollar business of turning around European copies of US sites.

The QWERTY Effect: How Typing May Shape the Meaning of Words

by Dave Mosher

Wired Science



The academic paper that's linked in the story is also worth reading, but *Wired's* Dave Mosher has done a good job of explaining the so-called QWERTY effect that two scientists say could be subtly changing how we perceive certain words — namely, those that are easier to type.

Recommended Reading

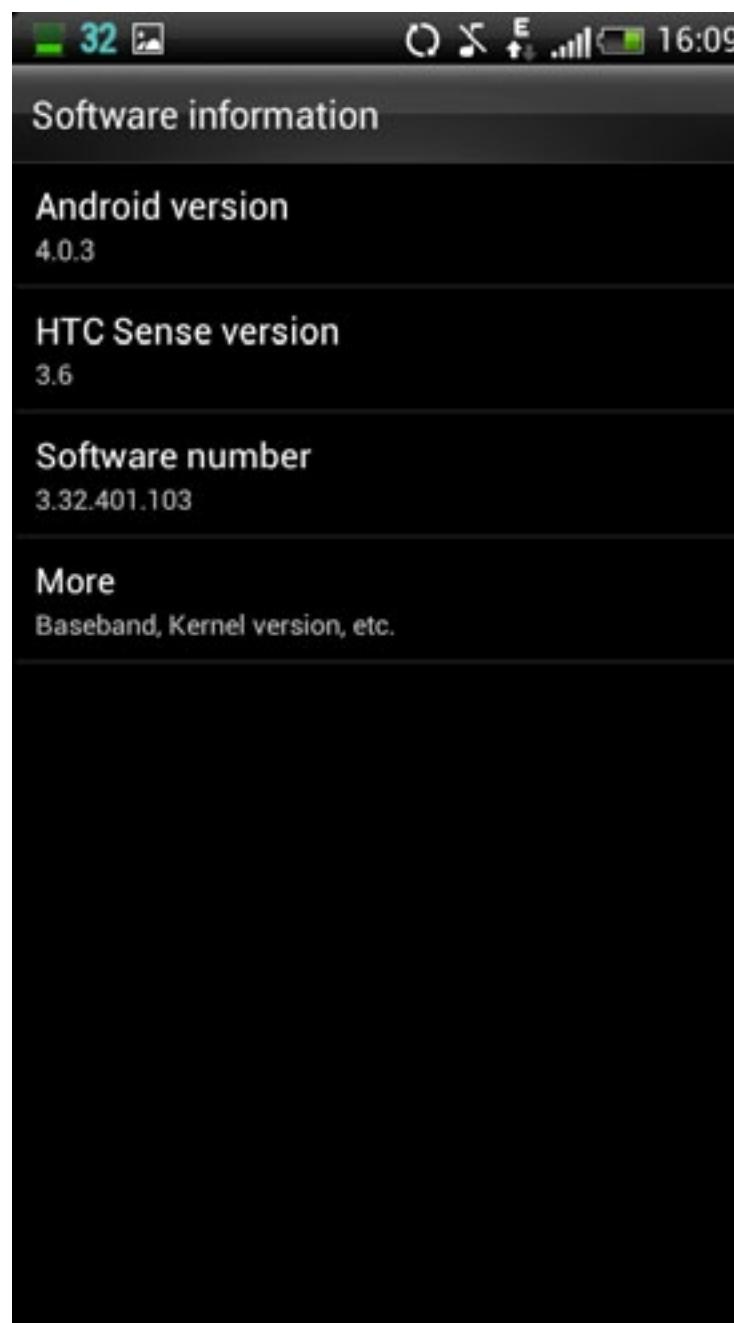
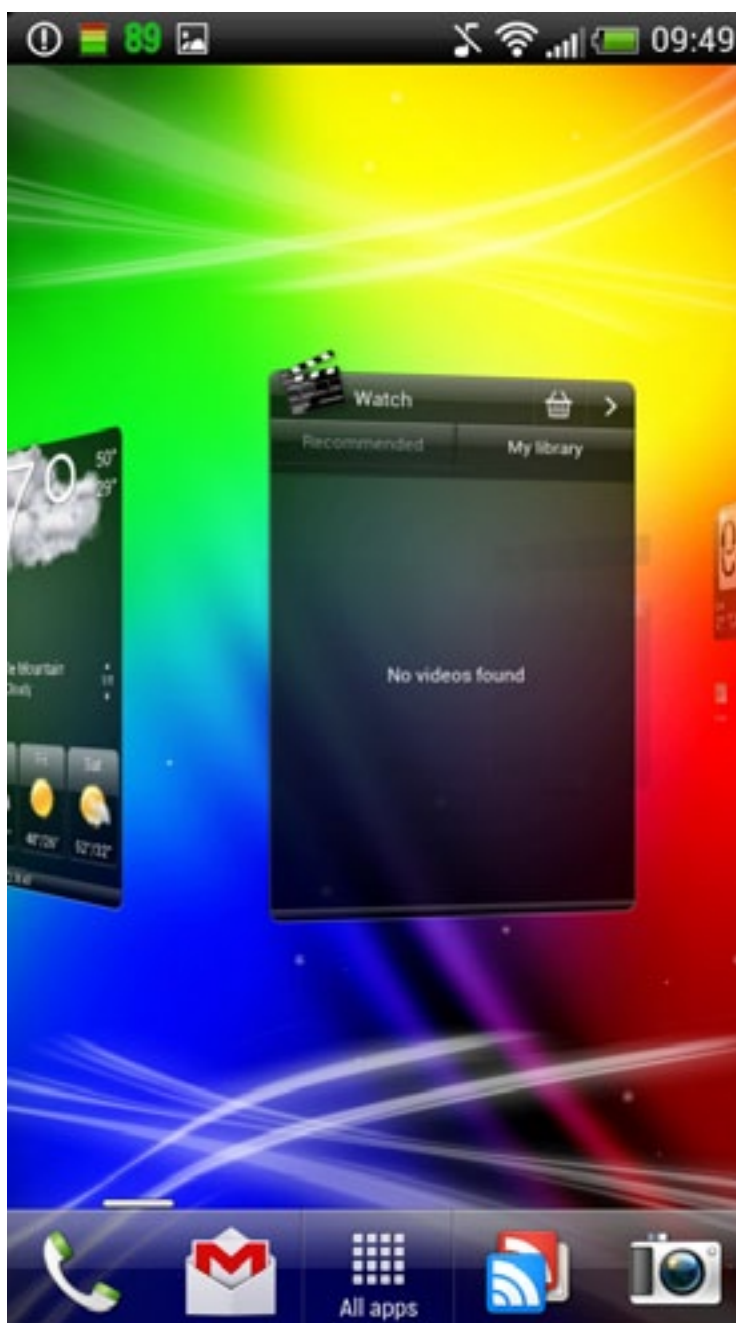


Preview

HTC Sense 3.6

BY BRAD MOLEN

It's been nearly four months since the Samsung Galaxy Nexus arrived, bearing the latest version of Google's mobile OS, known to most of us as Android 4.0 or Ice Cream Sandwich. In this span of time, only a handful of smartphones and tablets have been blessed with an upgrade to this iteration. Why? One word: differentiation. The majority of mobile manufacturers are determined to come up with their



own brands and tweak the open-source OS to their whimsy as a means of standing out from the rest of the crowd. But doing so involves several months of designing, programming and testing — for *each individual device*. Sadly, this means we're left waiting impatiently for most outfits to come out with their own customized skin.

Since the latest iteration of Android meant a considerable adjustment to the OS' design — as well as an endless list of new features, bug fixes and other improvements — the lengthy wait has left us only able to speculate and theorize what types of adjustments HTC will

make to its own adaptation of Android's user interface, nicknamed Sense. What's more, it was recently revealed that there would actually be not one but two versions of the UI running on ICS: Sense 4.0, the skin of choice for the One lineup, and 3.6, the option for whichever legacy HTC devices are lucky enough to be on the upgrade list. Even though both run Android 4.0, the two builds look drastically different. We only had a very limited amount of time to spend with the former at MWC, but we were given the opportunity to experience the latter on a Sensation XE. Now we can finally have our questions answered at long last:

This undeniably leads to further fragmentation of Sense... and it's not likely to get better anytime soon.

How will HTC integrate ICS into its Sense UI? How different will it look and feel? What features will the company dish up or throw in the trash? Uncover the mysteries with us as we offer an extensive preview of Sense 3.6.

Before we upgraded our Sensation XE to Sense 3.6, we were expecting to see something not unlike what's loaded on the One X and One S, both of which sport 4.0. Our assumption was based on the fact that HTC has recently focused on making Sense simpler, and we found ourselves wondering why HTC would bother cranking out two ICS-optimized versions of its skin that ultimately stand in complete opposition to one another. Yet that's exactly what happened: Sense 4.0 is the lighter and simpler UI, while Sense 3.6 looks a lot more like the old-school 3.0.

Both versions were developed in parallel to each other, which gave us even more reason to initially believe the two would be closer in look and features than they actually were. So what gives? According to HTC, there are a couple reasons: first, users of legacy devices are accustomed to the previous interface, and the upgrade adds the features and benefits of ICS without upsetting that user experience. Second, only the One lineup can support ImageSense,

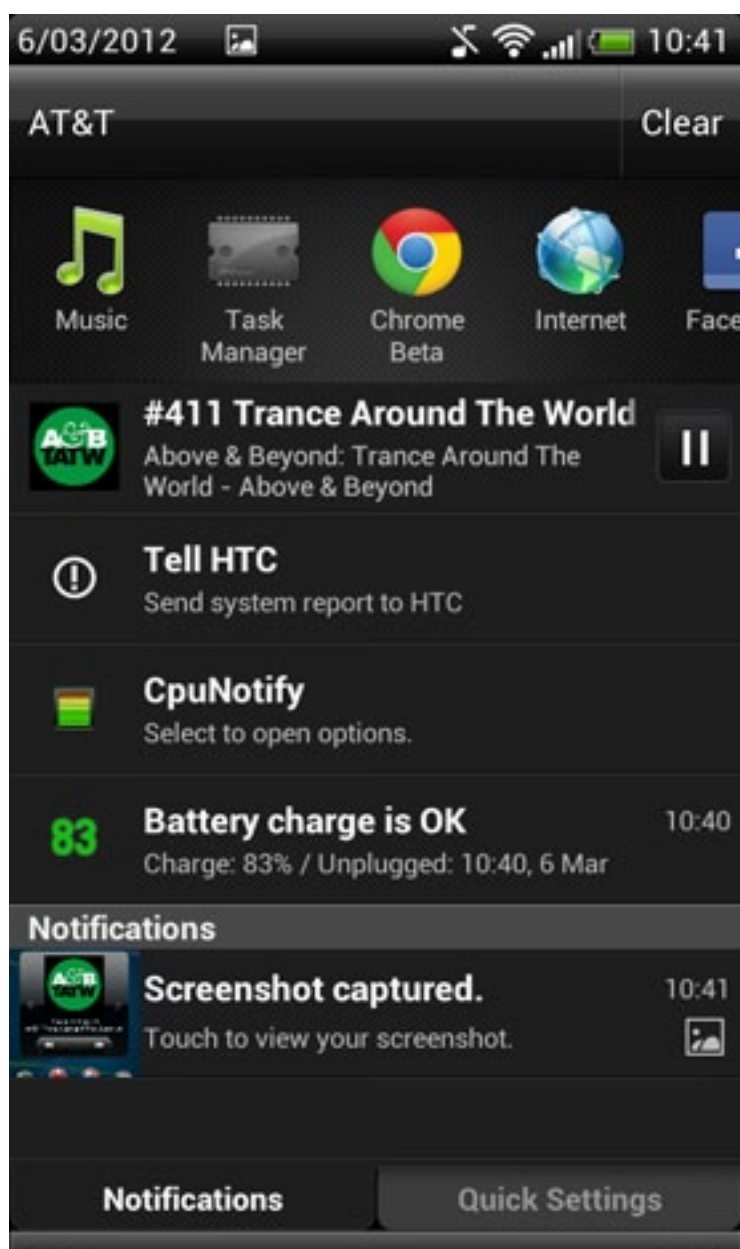
which is an integral part of Sense 4.0. Whether you agree with the reasoning or not, this undeniably leads to further fragmentation of Sense — something we've already seen to a lesser extent with 3.0 and 3.5 — and it's not likely to get better anytime soon.

Not only does this firmware look an awful lot like the version you just upgraded from, there's an interesting clash between the old user experience of Sense and the new UI design of ICS that may throw you off a bit. Essentially, Sense is suffering from an identity crisis, as if it's attempting to reconcile its future with its past. If you've played with stock Android 4.0, you'll notice that elements of the two interfaces are paired together inconsistently throughout the firmware. Imagine for a moment that you're ready to paint your bedroom but can't decide between two colors, so you throw both onto the wall. That's Sense 3.6.

Stepping off our soapbox, let's dive into what's new.

Home Screen

The unmistakable clock and weather widget, a staple on HTC devices dating back to Windows Mobile, hasn't gone anywhere in 3.6. But guess what has: the launch bar at the bottom of the screen. What was once a large eyesore that gave



the phone option way too much real estate, leaving barely enough room for the app menu and that unnecessary personalize button, has been completely transformed. The menu button is now smack-dab in the middle, flanked by up to two shortcuts on either side. As with stock Android 4.0, the options here are completely customizable, and you don't have to use up all four slots if you don't want to. Additionally, folders can be used as an option. Which reminds us, ICS' new folders can be added anywhere on the main screen, even though they have a Sense-ized look.

HTC keeps the ICS multitasking setup, easily accessible by long-pressing the

home button. The task killer is also available here by swiping the listed app to the left or right. When in the main home panel, a single tap of the home button will let you view (and quick jump to) any of the screens on the carousel. Yes, the love-or-hate 3D carousel is still here, a "feature" that won't be sticking around in 4.0. In fact, most 3.x animations haven't gone anywhere.

Fortunately, panels can be added and deleted here, something that wasn't possible on 3.0. Lastly, long-pressing the panel offers the usual Sense personalization options, and not just an option to change the wallpaper. Three different categories are tucked behind tabs lining the bottom of the screen.

Notification Menu

Pulling down the notification menu will reward you with nearly the same setup as you'll find in 3.0. It still has that dual-tab at the bottom, with notifications on the left and quick settings to the right. The quick settings tab offers the usual suite of WiFi, Bluetooth, Airplane Mode and Mobile Network toggles, and adds a button that'll let you select which specific WiFi hotspot you want to connect to. Some individual notifications now have small thumbnails, and most notifications can be swiped away a la ICS (excepting some that apply to the entire system), but you can't get at the official settings menu from here. Another refreshing feature brought over with Android 4.0 is access to the notification menu directly from the lock screen.

Lock Screen

At first glance you'll see nothing new. 3.6 offers the same ring at the bottom, with the standard four quick access shortcuts and date / time on the top. Most of its changes, however, are more than just skin deep. HTC retains the Face Unlock functionality in this version, for instance, and the shortcuts are also swappable — a feature that wasn't available until 3.5. There's a caveat here, though: the only way you can switch the apps is to put them in the launch bar, a stark contrast to 3.5, wherein you can change them to whatever you want through the personalization menu. And when you store folders in this section, the associated quick access shortcut will take you directly into the actual folder itself.

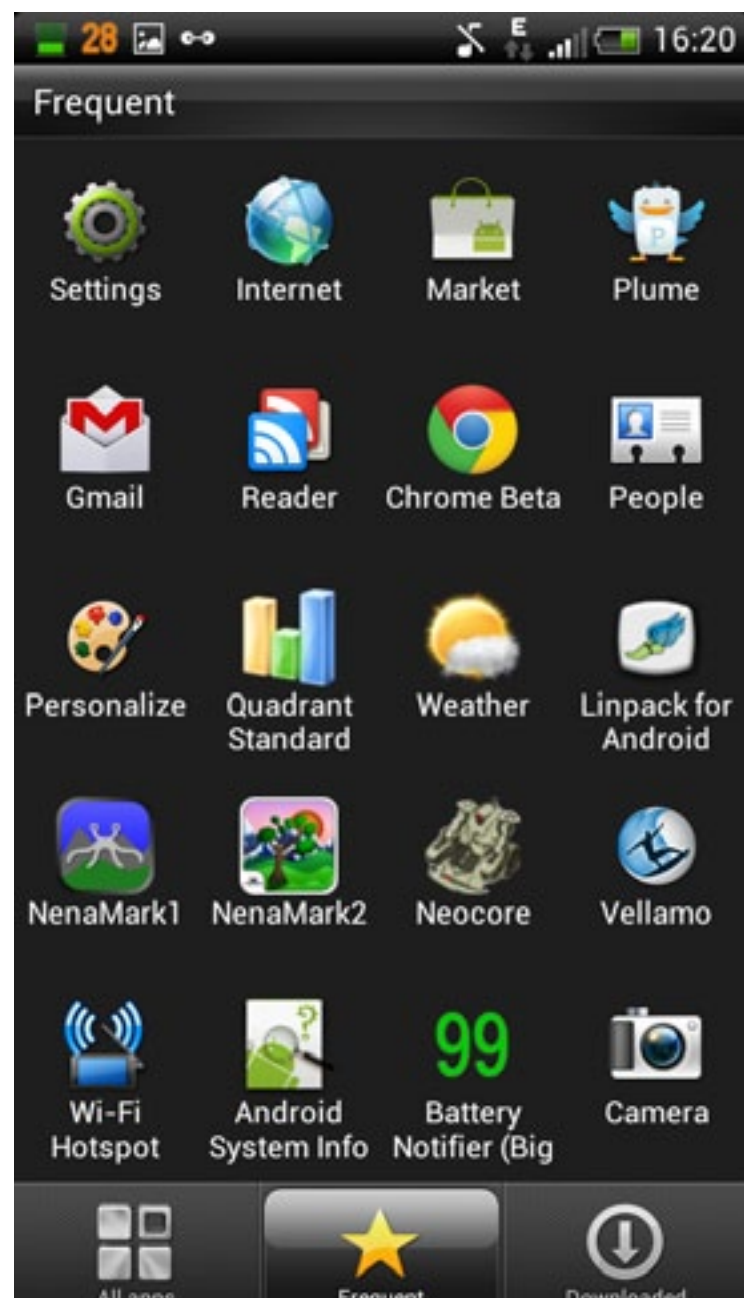
Capacitive Buttons

As you may recall from our review of stock Ice Cream Sandwich, the new version of Android aims to rid your device of the need for any type of physical or capacitive navigation buttons by adding three virtual ones at the absolute bottom of the display. Naturally, this doesn't do legacy phones or tablets a lick of good. In order to take advantage of the hardware the older devices have, HTC has blessed its keys with the same exact functionality as before. The capacitive menu button takes on its identical role, instead of the standard ICS version that shows up on different parts of the screen, depending on what you're doing. The only variation

to the menus is in the ICS-style design. Home, back and search perform no different on 3.6 either.

App Menu

Ah, the app menu. A refreshing design choice in stock ICS, but the same old story in Sense 3.6. You still swipe up and down through the grid, instead of left to right, and there are no widget or shortcut screens present — those are still only accessed from the personalize menu. The three tabs (all apps, frequent and downloaded) still sit at the bottom, although they're spaced out evenly



across the width of the screen. Even the menu button options are identical.

Phone

The Sense dialpad hasn't changed and there aren't any new features, but the app's seen some minor reshuffling nonetheless. Four tabs grace the bottom of the screen below the keypad: phone, people, groups and call history. The latter three options were here before, bundled together in the contacts app, and could be accessed from the dialpad; now, however, they all reside within the same app, making for a much more coherent arrangement. Aside from this move, HTC's made a few tiny tweaks here and there to reflect the ICS design.

Browser

Sense 3.6 offers a slight design tweak to HTC's default browser, but it's not extreme by any measure. The URL bar remains on top, with the refresh button sitting on the right. New to the team, however, is the dedicated back button on the left — a much more convenient location than in 3.0, where it was resigned to the options menu. The whole ensemble proudly resembles the ICS design scheme. You're treated to nearly the same suite of settings, but the "view desktop site" toggle switch has found a home here. Unfortunately, the experimental ring-style navigation menu that we enjoyed in stock Android 4.0 was shunned by HTC this time around. And for the diehards who are

BENCHMARK	SENSE 3.0	SENSE 3.6
Quadrant (v2)	2,097	2,213
Linpack (single-thread)	54.05	45.91
Linpack (multi-thread)	75.4	56.79
NenaMark1	46.4	60.7
NenaMark2	24.9	41.2
Neocore	61.1	61.1
SunSpider 9.1 ¹	3,366	2,020
Vellamo	1,043	1,562
GLBenchmark - Egypt (fps)	24	46

¹Lower is better

curious, Chrome is indeed available in this version of Sense, so knock yourselves out.

Beats Audio Integration

Anyone faithful to HTC because of its marriage to Beats won't find anything new to rave about with 3.6. Sadly, system-wide Beats integration — the option to use it when playing third party apps — is nowhere to be seen here. HTC told us this is due to a deeper recoding of the audio system as part of Sense 4.0, so Beats enthusiasts will have no choice but to buy a device in the One lineup.

Performance

Sense 3.0 got raked over the coals for being sluggish and bogging down the OS, so it was a matter of natural curiosity for us to see how the upgrade performed. The user interface itself still offers much of the same experience, so



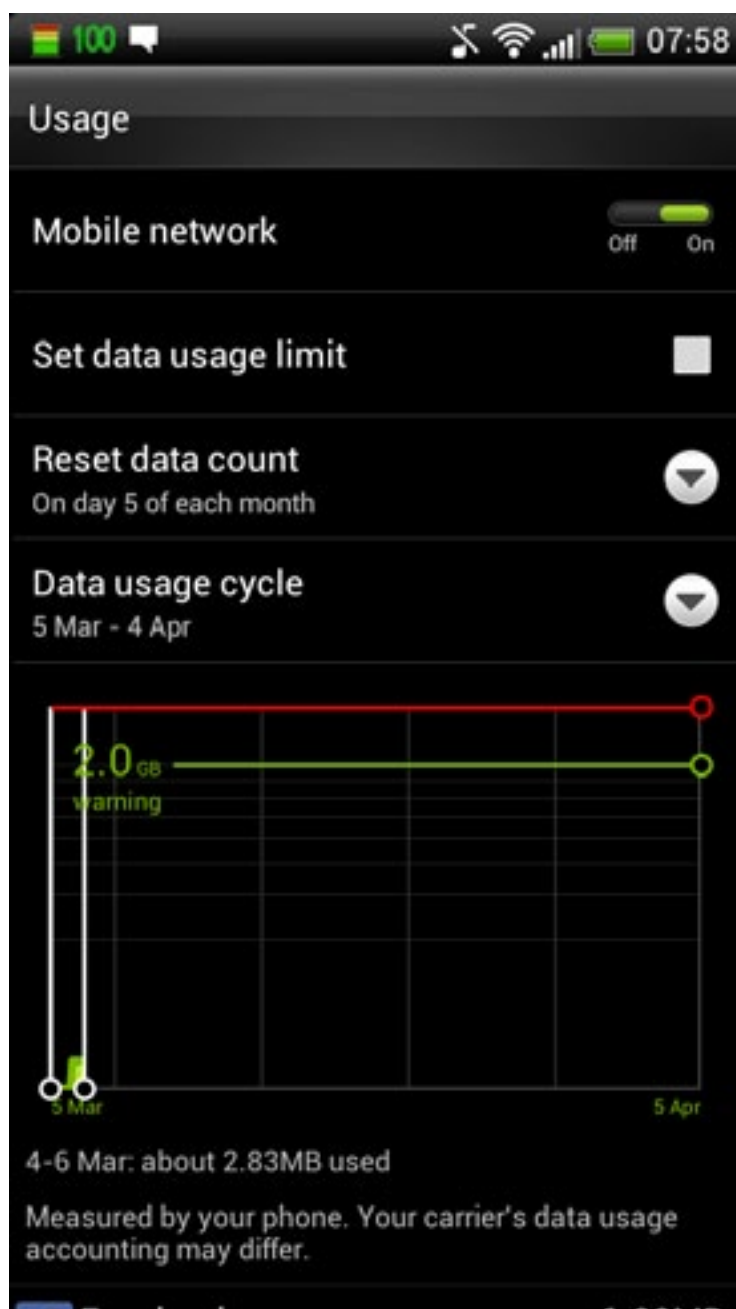
we weren't expecting Sense to perform much better as a result. To our surprise, 3.6 fared noticeably better than its predecessor. This gives us cause to wonder if this had more to do with the ICS framework than HTC's own tweaks. Either way, we ran a few benchmarks on the same Sensation XE before and after the update, and the results are actually quite interesting.

We saw huge performance increases in the browser and graphics, though other processes were mixed: Quadrant Standard scores were consistently higher, but Linpack results suffered greatly. Overall, the majority of benchmarks we

ran suggest Sense 3.6 is in far better shape than the previous firmware, but we still can't help but wonder if it would be even more improved if it ran something similar to 4.0 (read: lighter and simpler) instead.

Miscellaneous

Certainly, the design changes didn't stop there — there are several microscopically tiny adjustments scattered throughout Sense 3.6, but most of them won't ensure that your experience with the new UI will be any better than its predecessors. Still, there were a few nuggets that caught our eye.



CAMERA: Few, if any, tweaks were made to the camera on our Sensation XE, but we're not certain that the user interface will look identical across HTC's entire lineup (with adjustments for devices with different types of cameras, for example).

NO EASTER EGGS: Nothing happened when we repeatedly tapped the Android version number, which likely means HTC has disabled the stock ICS Nyan-cat Easter egg. We have a hard time believing that anyone's crying over the loss, especially since 3.0 didn't offer any such buried surprises either.


SCENES STILL SHOW 3.0 SCREENSHOTS: When you browse through the

different Scene options, take a closer look at the actual screenshots. They were brought over from 3.0, with the same ugly launch bar we're so happy to shed. Don't worry, changing Scenes won't revert you back to the old style.

SCREENSHOTS: All of the screenshots you see in this preview were taken by simply holding down the volume down button and power / screen lock button, as on stock ICS.

DISABLING APPS: To our relief, HTC didn't take away the ability to disable apps. We should note, however, that our preview is based on how Sense 3.6 functions on unlocked devices, so we can't be completely certain that carriers won't meddle with this functionality to suit their own bloatware.

Wrap-Up

HTC's legacy Sense UI performs better with Ice Cream Sandwich added to the mix, but the user experience as a whole has changed very little. The company has done this on purpose to satisfy users that were accustomed to the way Sense looks and feels, but if you weren't a fan before, Sense 3.6 isn't going to magically change your mind. What it does, though, is convince us that even the heaviest skins will benefit from Matias Duarte's good graces. As to when it will actually show up, well, that's a completely different story. 

Brad is a mobile editor at Engadget, an outdoorsy guy, and a lover of eccentric New Wave and electro.



Sony Xperia S

The Xperia S is well-equipped for entertainment, with an amazing screen, HDMI and good streaming capabilities. But those looking for more well-rounded strengths will be disappointed.

BY SHARIF SAKR

Has spring 2012 brought a rebirth to the Xperia range, or just a rebranding? On the face of it, that's an easy one. The Sony Xperia S (codenamed "Nozomi") is the first handset we've reviewed in the post-Ericsson era and you only have to glance at its spec sheet to see that more has changed than just the logo. The 4.3-inch



LCD display outguns older Xperias with a bright and contrasty 1280 x 720 resolution. This feature alone helps the device to sit more snugly on the Sony family sofa, where it can share popcorn with the tablets, PCs and TVs that Kaz & Co. want to merge into a seamless media-munching ecosystem. The Xperia S' camera pushes in that same direction, shooting 12-megapixel stills and 1080p video and then streaming its creations to other displays over HDMI and DLNA. Rounding it off, you get quirky features like NFC and a distinctive, Bravia-like physical design. But not everything here is so fresh and spring-like: other aspects of the device are still tinged with winter, as you'll discover if you read on.



Hardware

Like any good tour, this one begins at the bar — the distinctive, LED-lit plastic bar that appears to segment the Xperia S into two parts. Having seen the phone handed around a room of bloggers before we picked up our review sample, it was one of the first things people noticed, and it was either championed or chided depending on each person's taste. Bearing in mind that Engadget has a thing for Tron furniture and fur coats, we actually kinda like it. The three Android navigation buttons are etched into the bar and look nice when it lights up.

So yes, we enjoy it, but there are equally as many reasons not to. For a start, it makes the device feel longer than it

needs to be, and considering it's already a lot thicker than previous Xperias (e.g., the Xperia Arc), that's a big sacrifice. What's more, it doesn't do Philips Ambilight-style tricks like the Xperia U, and it doesn't necessarily have the same technical justification as the aluminum unibody Xperia P.

A more serious problem with the Xperia S' hardware isn't the way it looks, but the way it's built. There are seams everywhere, where plastic meets plastic around the translucent bar, around the port covers, around the scratch resistant screen and around the rear cover. These gaps attract dust, make the device feel unfairly cheap considering the high quality materials, and occasionally cause the port covers to pop open if they catch on your finger or pocket. Considering that the 1,750mAh battery isn't removable and the 16 to 32GB of onboard storage isn't expandable via microSD, the rear cover seems unnecessary — we would rather have had a Micro SIM drawer, better flaps over the ports and a Lumia 800-style unibody instead. Sony's designers may be based in Lund, Sweden, but with the Xperia S they haven't been Nordic enough.

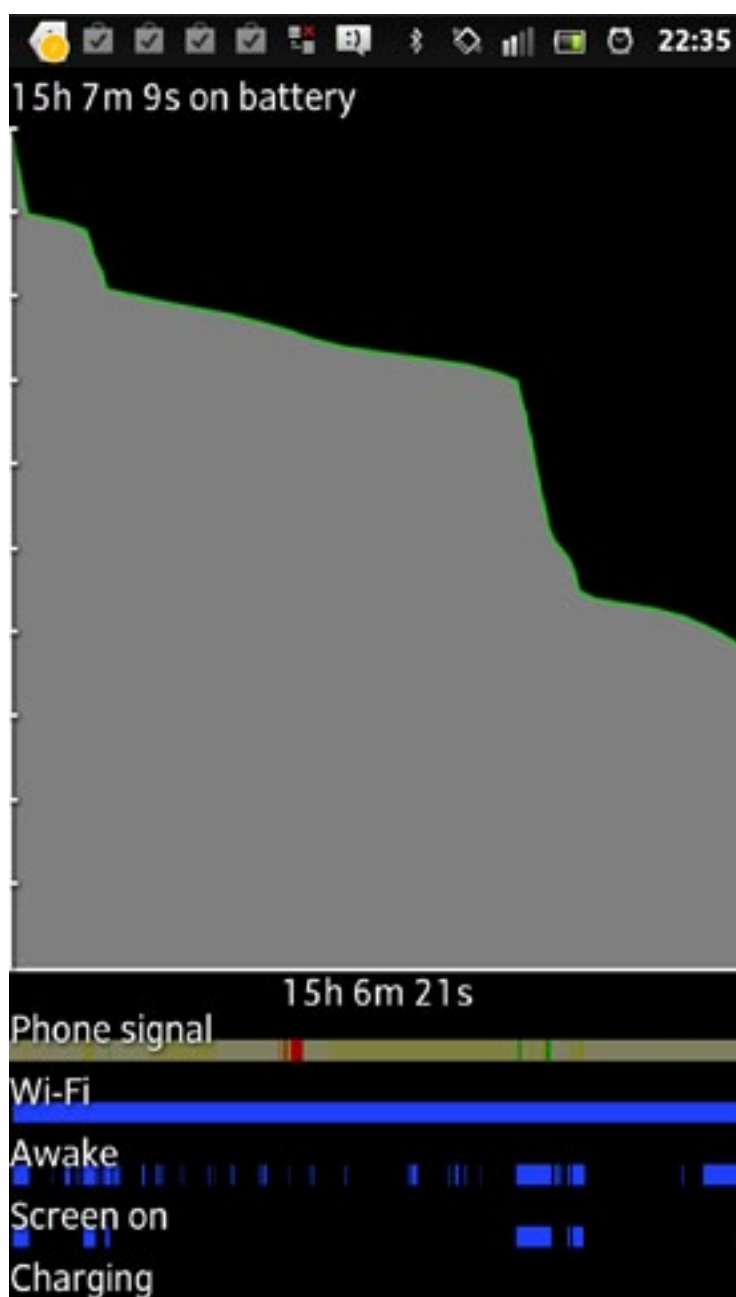
There's an issue with the navigation buttons too. The touch-sensitive spots for Back, Home and Options are nowhere near their corresponding icons in the translucent bar, and they're unmarked, save for three barely visible silver dots. Not knowing where precisely to aim your finger initially results in a lot of mis-hits, and the but-

tons themselves aren't particularly responsive, but you do get used to them after three or four days. Virtual buttons might be preferable, but there's no way they could come with the promised upgrade to Android 4.0 — that would make the design of the lower part of the phone completely redundant. Speaking of ICS, we initially heard it might be here already, but now the word is Q2.

Display

Just when the Xperia S' build quality makes us feel low, the wonderful display picks us up again. Every single time. It may be plain old TFT LCD rather than AMOLED, but at least there's no PenTile pixel arrangement here and the 342ppi pixel density renders everything with perfect stability and smoothness. We'd much rather watch a movie on the Xperia S than on the AMOLED-equipped PlayStation Vita, for example. Although the Vita has a bigger screen and better stereo speakers, the Xperia S delivers sharper, more colorful images — plus the sound from its speaker is louder and more engaging.

The display's strength is also readily apparent when you compare it side-by-side with an older, LCD-packing Xperia like the Arc. You won't see it on a photo unless you look closely enough to notice the matrix of pixels on the Arc, but load up the Kindle app and things become more obvious: text looks blocky at 854 x 480 resolution but immaculate at 1280 x 720. The Arc also has worse viewing angles.



The screen performs admirably outdoors and proves just what LCD is capable of when it's implemented properly. While some other LCD displays can be quickly obscured by excessive reflections outdoors, the Xperia S' panel retains its contrast much better. There's a consistent yellow tinge to all white areas, especially compared to the more neutral Retina Display on the iPhone 4, but the Mobile BRAVIA Engine seems to make up for that when watching movies and stills. Overall, it's clear that Sony has invested a lot of time and money in getting this new panel just right.

Calling and Reception

As you'd hope, there's little to report here. We used the phone solidly for a week and found that it flicked sensibly between bands, gave us consistent reception, and handled data averagely well at regular HSPA speeds on the UK Vodafone network. The speaker worked fine both ways, as did the bundled headset — although as ever we only used it once to test it, before switching to some proper headphones (in this instance, an amazing pair of IE 80s lent to us by Sennheiser). The Xperia S has a smart notification LED that glows different colors to indicate different events, such

as blue for a missed call and orange for charging. This is something missing from many rival phones, and anyone who depends on their smartphone for productivity will appreciate it.

Camera

The 12-megapixel shooter on the Xperia S is a world away from last year's Xperias. You get fuller controls, including Exposure Value, ISO, Focus Mode, Metering Mode and White Balance (manual or presets). Even better, you can position up to four controls of your choosing on the main viewfinder screen, which provides quicker access to the settings you adjust most frequently.

You also get much faster operation, with the ability to hold the dedicated camera button down while the phone is still in standby mode and snap off a shot within 1.4 seconds, by our measure. This way of shooting doesn't produce great results, because it gives you no time to frame or focus accurately, but it does prove what the camera module is capable of, and it may come in handy on the odd occasion. During regular operation, taking shots as normal within the camera app, the Xperia S was extremely responsive.

As for the pictures themselves, they testify to good automatic exposure, white balance and flash control, and they're sumptuous on the phone's display: sharp, bright, colorful and contrasty. The combination of the hi-res sensor and HD display also helps low-light shots, because the camera is able



to pump up gain while hiding noise among the abundance of pixels — i.e., the noise is there, and it's pretty bad, but you have to zoom in further to see it.

The Xperia S' camera is a treat if you primarily view photos on the phone itself. However, if you occasionally want to blow up a picture to frame it, or if you want to display your pictures on a bigger screen over the HDMI output or DLNA, then there's an important caveat.

Previous Xperias, such as the Neo, suffered from excessive image compression, and that's still unfortunately an issue with the Xperia S. There's no option to change the JPEG settings to create bigger, prettier files comparable to what you'd get on the Galaxy S II or iPhone 4. The default compression has improved considerably since the Neo, with 12-megapixel stills averaging a file size of 3MB, but that's still not enough.

The Xperia S creates JPEG files that are around 25 percent bigger than those from an iPhone 4, even though they contain 240 percent more pixels. So you can zoom in further on an Xperia S image, but what will you find when you get there? Either Sony is callously wasting the power of Xperia S' higher resolution Exmor R sensor, or they're deliberately maxing out on compression in order to disguise the fact that the sensor is noisy. Either way, the resultant image quality is designed for superficial viewing only, and we'd still rather shoot on an aged iPhone 4 (let alone a 4S).

It was a similar story with 1080p video, which was compressed to around 100MB per minute. The Nokia Lumia 800 also shoots between 80MB and 100MB per minute, but with 720p resolution. Despite the over-zealous compression, however, we were generally pleased with Xperia S' clips: auto-focus was slow but dependable, there weren't too many sudden switches in exposure or white balance and audio levels were consistent.

Performance and Battery Life

The Xperia S arrived too soon to be endowed with any of the new chips revealed at MWC. Instead, it contains one of the better processors from last year: the dual-core 1.5GHz Qualcomm MSM8260. We've already spent a lot of time with this processor, on phones like the HTC Sensation XE, and it's certainly powerful enough to handle the functions the Xperia S is designed for. There are no lags or stutters to note, browsing is fluid, and there's no nasty mismatch between the battery and processor either. We scraped just under two full days with light use, involving a maximum of two hours spent out of standby each day and careful connection settings. Even heavy usage patterns, such as leaving WiFi on (as in the 15-hour day below) and watching movie trailers (an addiction with a screen like this), left the Xperia S with plenty of reserves when we hit the sack. A standard battery test with looped video yielded over five hours, which is around the same as the Sensation XE despite the Xperia's higher resolution screen.

Here's how the processor stacks up against the Xperia Arc S and — for a bit of fun — the Galaxy Note, whose Exynos processor was another great SoC from last year. The Xperia S holds its own, especially when it comes to graphics and browsing benchmarks.

Software

If you've never heard of Android 2.3.7, then here's everything you need to

BENCHMARK	XPERIA S	XPERIA ARC S	GALAXY NOTE
Quadrant ¹	2,033	1,158	3,998
Linpack ¹ (single-thread)	53.67	34.54	64.3
Linpack ¹ (multi-thread)	83.70	38.88	95.66
NenaMark2 ¹ (fps)	37.1	13.6	32.8
Neocore ¹	59.7	59.4	51.77
SunSpider 9.1 ² (ms)	2,653	3,369	2,902

¹Higher is better

²Lower is better

know: it's old. The Xperia skin that sits lightly on top of the OS is very familiar too, as are the various pre-loaded apps and social networking integration efforts, such as TimeScape, which we've covered in previous reviews. Some of these additions are good, like the music app which has a good equalizer system. Others are bad, like the repeated McAfee antivirus notifications that are too difficult to exterminate.

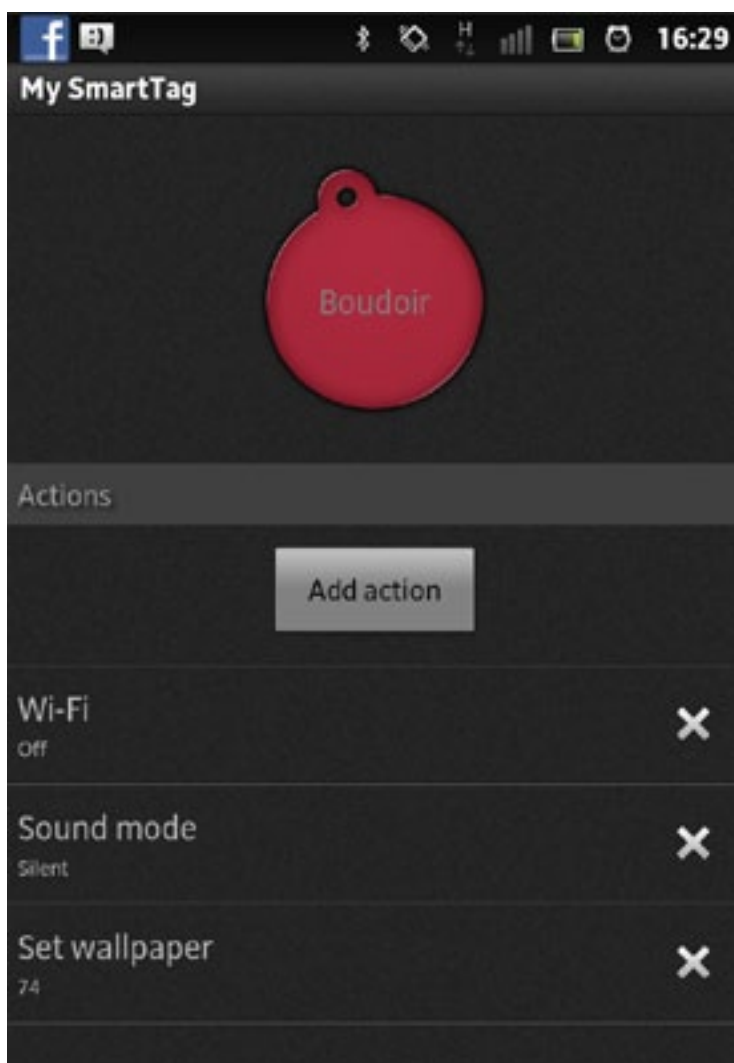
Aside from the bloatware, however, Sony has come up with some genuinely exciting stuff. The Xperia S integrates well with the Xperia SmartWatch, for example, sending notifications straight to your wrist over Bluetooth. We only had a chance to play with a prototype SmartWatch, but we had fun with it and no one can deny that Sony is sticking its neck out to do something different.

Sony has found useful employment for NFC, bundling the Xperia S with two NFC SmartTags that you can use to automatically change your phone settings to suit different locations. You

simply hold the tag against the handset to initialize it, and then choose various actions that will be triggered the next time the tag comes into contact. These settings aren't flexible enough to make this very useful yet — there's no airplane mode, you can't disable data without disabling calls, and you can't stack instructions on top of each other to achieve more sophisticated automation. Perhaps these things will come in a software update, but for now Sony gets points more for the idea than the practicality.

Notice a theme developing here? Yup, that'd be the need for patience, as Sony gradually (perhaps too gradually) makes good on the promise of its new ideas. That applies to NFC, but it applies even more to another key area of the Xperia S' software: it's ability to hook up with Sony's gaming, video and music platforms. It's supposed to be great, but the reality hasn't quite caught up.

Take a movie rental as an example. There's a placeholder app for the Play-



Station Store on the Xperia S, but it doesn't work. Instead, you can use the pre-loaded Video Unlimited app, which offers exactly the same video content as the PS Store, for the same prices, using the same login and credit card details, but which is totally separate. A purchase you made on the PS Store on another Sony device — such as the PS Vita — won't be remembered in Video Unlimited, and vice versa.

Now, this *might* all be solved in a week's time, when the PS Store placeholder app informs us it will 'wake up' and start doing stuff. If that happens, our complaint will become a spring shower in a tea cup. On the other hand, it's also possible that the two storefronts will operate in parallel for some time. We asked Sony about this, and got the following

reply: *"While the Sony Entertainment Network storefront is fully integrated among the various Sony devices compatible with the Video Unlimited service and the PlayStation Network Video Store, our device domain model currently restricts playback of rented or purchased content. While we are exploring a less restrictive model, at this time, users who download content to Xperia (or PS Vita) can only play that content back on that device."*

Confusing? Just a little. You also have to bear in mind that Sony rarely gets things done in a hurry. The PlayStation Suite is a case in point. This is yet another storefront that will offer independently produced titles for the Xperia S and other PlayStation-certified devices, but developers are still testing




out the SDK. There's no clear timeline for when their creations might start to appear in the Suite, or when the Suite might appear on the Xperia range. If you imagine that Kaz Hirai only has to click his fingers for things to get done, the Xperia S will likely prove you wrong.

Wrap-Up

Could the Xperia S be your first Sony-branded phone? If you're all about media consumption, and if you're prepared to wait while Sony makes its cloud-based platforms more coherent, then the Xperia S is a great device. The display and the speaker are absorbing and addictive. The battery life is excellent, the processor is a good fit and the absence of expandable storage shouldn't weigh too heavily if you get the 32GB option.

On the other hand, if you make more varied demands of your smartphone — like excellent build quality, pocket-friendly slimness or photos you can enlarge — then things get more complicated. US pricing has yet to be announced, but the 32GB version of the Xperia S is going for upwards of £430 (\$680) SIM-free in the UK, or £370 pay-as-you-go on the Three network. Similar money could fetch you a legendary all-rounder like the Galaxy S II, or stretch to a 16GB Galaxy Nexus with an HD screen and better build quality, or — very soon — an HTC One S, which promises a cutting-edge Qualcomm S4 processor and a better camera. When sized up against a long

rubric of criteria, rather than just its entertainment credentials, there's little to make the Xperia S a compelling purchase. 

Sharif is a British tech journalist with ten years' experience filming and reporting news for the BBC and other broadcasters.

BOTTOMLINE

Sony Xperia S

£370 (\$580)

PROS

- 1280 X 720 LCD is perfect for movies
- Decent performance and battery life
- Brings Sony vibes (and media) to your phone

CONS

- Chunky with weak build quality
- Camera output is only superficially good
- Sony ecosystem needs to be more cohesive

The Xperia S is well-equipped for entertainment, with an amazing screen, HDMI and good streaming capabilities. But those looking for more well-rounded strengths will be disappointed.

NINTENDO



SONY

MICROSOFT



Three very different takes on portable gaming at GDC 2012

BY SEAN BUCKLEY

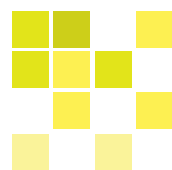


IM COOK SAYS THE DARNEDEST THINGS.

Why, just last week Apple's head honcho suggested that iPad users are ditching their home consoles in favor of Cupertino's favorite slate. Those bold words can't be sitting well with the gaming industry's big three. Steady thy rifle, hardcore gamer, Cook has a point: the console wars have shifted irreversibly. Gone are the days of bickering over somewhat similar 16-bit consoles and their supposed lack of "processing;" today's gaming armies wage war with wildly different artillery. In the pursuit of your mobile gaming dollars, Nintendo toed a traditional line with a new twist. Sony,

on the other hand, seems to have bundled every input method it could into the PS Vita. Microsoft, however, puts the "mobile" in mobile gaming, echoing Apple's approach with a platform that eschews dedicated hardware to float across devices as a "feature."

Take a step back, and suddenly it appears the major players aren't even driving on the same track. This war isn't about the "most powerful" console anymore; it's about creating the right experience for today's gamer. We ducked under the unspoken truce of last week's Game Developer Conference to get a bead on Nintendo, Microsoft and Sony's portable gaming strategies.



NINTENDO

The old guard of console gaming: it set trends, crushed enemies and even created the portable gaming market. No surprise, then, that one of the console gaming industry's most storied founders feels pressure to keep moving.

"We want to not necessarily follow the trends," David Young, Nintendo's Assistant Manager of Public Relations, told us. "But we want to do something different, surprising. Something unique that will really pull people into the game."

Young was talking about the Nintendo 3DS and the outfit's approach to keeping

on top of the changing mobile market.

“We like to offer unique experiences, something that doesn’t follow a traditional path. It’s all about trying to surprise the user,” he said.

The idea is something new, fresh and different will stir an interest in gaming in a new user-base. Young cited the DS’ touch-screen and the Wii’s waggle-riffic remote as experiences that pulled in a new crowd.

Nintendo says the 3DS is one of the few portable 3D experiences available to consumers, excepting select smartphones, and that its portability is key.

“It has a lot of little surprises that are designed to get people to carry it with them all the time, not like a phone, which you carry because it’s a *phone*—but because of things like the StreetPass function,” Young explained.

The mention of a phone struck us, folks carry phones around for more than voice communication these days — does Nintendo feel threatened by the smartphone’s entry into the mobile gaming arena? If so, Young wasn’t shaking in *his* boots, he wrote off the growing mobile market as an issue of quality over quantity.

“Rather than having 1,000 games of varying quality, we’d rather see, maybe, 100 games of a higher quality.”

Young argued the market iPad users are seemingly choosing over their dedicated hardware may be self defeating.

“You’ve got to wonder what you’re doing to your market if you’re getting your user base used to getting games for 99 cents or, for free. If your market has been *trained*

▶▶ **We like to offer unique experiences, something that doesn’t follow a traditional path.** ▶▶

for that, what growth are you going to get from your bigger, better titles?”

For all its tablet-esque controllers, resistive touchscreen devices and stereoscopic handhelds, Nintendo seems to be toeing its own traditional line. They ask what they can offer the consumer that’s new, shocking and innovative. It isn’t surprising: in fact, it *feels* like Nintendo. Maybe that’s good — but not all of its innovations have been a success, and *some* have even led to the birth of new rivals.



Those rivals include PlayStation, which was partially born of a failed partnership between Sony and Nintendo to create a CD-ROM accessory for Super Nintendo. Sony Computer Entertainment was formed after the SNES-CD project fell through and, well, the rest is not only history, but also a series of killer consoles. The outfit’s entry into the mobile market got caught up in a bitter rivalry with Nintendo’s dual-screen wunderkind, but failed to surpass it. The Vita, however, is a different beast with a tweaked approach to mobile.

“The PlayStation Vita is sort of a weird hybrid,” Will Powers SCEA associate PR

generalist and former winner of PlayStation's *The Tester*, told us. "It's interesting because when it was in prototype, the hardware engineers went around to studios and developers — they went in-house with developers and asked them what *they* wanted to see."

From the very beginning, Powers said, the Vita's design was approached from a different angle than most consoles.

"This is the first time they went out to developers and asked, 'What do you want?' It's really a product of what our developers want to see, not to mention the feedback we got for the PSP and the PSP Go, from both developers *and* the community and consumers," he said.

As Sony tells it, it takes a consumer-facing approach when it comes to product development — every major decision is reportedly based on a simple question: Is this for the gamers?

Powers said asking this question is what led to the prevalence of region-free compatibility in PlayStation products. The same philosophy carried over to the Vita's "all-in" design, which seems to give the handheld every possible functionality a gamer might conceivably want.

"We wanted to drastically reduce the barrier of entry — when we have functionalities like the touchscreen, but also have the buttons and dual-analogs," Powers said. "we're trying to appease all the markets that would be interested in the system."

While the Vita is very much a core system, Sony wanted it to be inclusive of mobile games as well. Sony hopes devel-

opers will recognize this and bring their smartphone / tablet titles to the Vita.

"We really built this device to be used in any situation. Sure, you might own a tablet, but have you ever tried to use it in bed? It gets kind of heavy, and you almost hit yourself in the face with it," Powers said.

The Vita is designed to get around that, to be able to play any kind of game comfortably. Sony wants its doors open to all possibilities, for all consumers.

"We're a champion and advocate of our products," Powers summarized. "This is something that we believe in."



Despite their differences, Sony and Nintendo's portable offerings are two sides of the same coin. Microsoft, on the other hand, is trading in a different currency — aligning more with Tim Cook's vision of gaming than Shigeru Miyamoto's. Microsoft has explicitly stated that Windows Phone is its mobile platform for games. An Xbox portable simply isn't on the way; your phone is it. The lack of a dedicated device and the physical controls that come with it isn't necessarily a bad thing, but it illustrates a clear difference between Microsoft and its competitors: Redmond simply isn't trying to create a "core gaming" experience. That's not to say there aren't a few games Microsoft would happily ascribe the moniker to, of course — games like *The Harvest*, *Rocket Riot* and *Sonic the Hedgehog 4*:



Our goal is to create one seamless Xbox Live service across various platforms...

Episode I, for instance — but at its heart, Xbox Live for Windows Phone is less a “mobile platform” and more of an avenue to an Xbox experience.

“Today, Xbox Live is available on Xbox 360, Windows Phone, and Windows 8, offering a range of games with something for everyone across these devices,” a Microsoft representative told us. “Our goal is to create one seamless Xbox Live service across various platforms, providing on-the-go access to your favorite games and Xbox LIVE experiences.”

For Microsoft, “one seamless Xbox Live service” is the crux of their mobile offering and that’s definitely what you get. Windows Phone’s Xbox Live hub taps into your profile, friends list, messages, avatar and gamerscore — elegantly stitched together to mesh with the console experience. Because Microsoft is more concerned with maintaining a uniform Xbox Live experience than it is with dominating the mainstream portable gaming market. However, it’s the odd man out — Microsoft isn’t competing with Sony and Nintendo’s mobile offerings, it’s competing with Android

and iOS. What’s more, it’s *banking* on the Xbox name and its seamless service to draw users in. The Windows Phone versions of *Angry Birds* and *Doodle Jump* may pack a handful of gamer-score-bolstering achievements, but that Xbox Live integration comes at a premium over the iOS and Android versions. Microsoft isn’t flinching, however:

“We believe the quality and consistency of what we offer with Xbox Live speaks for itself, and provides an opportunity to bring together everyone from core Xbox 360 users to first-time gamers on Windows Phone.”

The console wars are very different now, particularly on the mobile front. Between Nintendo’s niche innovations, Sony’s all-in portable powerhouse and Microsoft’s service-centric mobile apps, we wonder if these gaming giants are even fighting on the same battlefield. Maybe they aren’t. On the console front, choosing between a PS3 or Xbox 360 might be a definitive choice — they offer similar experiences and game libraries. That isn’t happening here. On the mobile front, gamers are choosing between a well-integrated phone, a handheld 3D experience and a dual-analog dream, each unique enough to stand on its own *without* making its competition redundant. Sure, the trifecta is competing in *spirit*, but in reality their products are almost complementary, balanced parts of a dedicated gamer’s collection. The portable gaming market is more diverse than ever, and we couldn’t be happier. Can we stop fighting now?





HP Envy 14 Spectre

The Spectre looks the part of a premium Ultrabook, but its average performance and stiff touchpad don't fully justify the high starting price.

BY DANA WOLLMAN

In a previous life, the HP Envy 14 was a laptop's laptop: a 5.69-pound slugger with an optical drive, discrete AMD graphics and a battery that couldn't last four hours in our battery rundown test. That notebook — one of our favorites in the 2010-2011 year — met its fate last fall when HP redesigned its high-end Envy line,



but instead of going wherever it is gadgets go to die it was reincarnated as an Ultrabook. The new Envy 14, dubbed the Spectre, has shed almost two pounds, along with its discrete graphics and outmoded optical drive. It's also one of the first 14-inch Ultrabooks to hit the market, but even if it weren't so oddly sized we'd have no trouble remembering it: after all, how many laptops have a built-in NFC chip, or a glass palm rest?

There's no doubt about it: the Spectre is a premium machine, and it's not just that HP needed something high-end to take the place of the last-gen Envy 14. This also happens to be the company's first consumer-grade Ultrabook, and it arrives at a time when there are many to choose from. Enter HP's marketing

department: the outfit's touting this thing as a "premium Ultrabook" — the kind of machine you'd choose if you wanted a 1600 x 900 IPS-quality display or an unorthodox design. For that kind of beauty, though, you're looking at \$1,400 and up — a princely cost of entry when you consider lots of similarly specced models go for \$1,100 or less. But perhaps that splurge comes with more than just a head-turning design? There's only one way to find out: follow along for our in-depth review.

Look and Feel

Though the Spectre clearly shares some genes with the new Envy 15 and 17, it's obvious HP chose this machine as a guinea pig for some bolder design

choices. For starters, the PC is swaddled in Gorilla Glass. You heard right: *glass*. That includes that flat fingerprint magnet of a lid, along with a thick shield stretching across the palm rest, creating a plateau below the keyboard. Think of a table at a pizzeria, the kind where the management uses thick glass to protect that all-important checkered tablecloth from marinara spills. A corny analogy? Why yes, you're welcome. But really, hear us out: this is pretty much what HP was going for. In a recent conversation, product managers who shepherded the laptop through the development process told us they particularly wanted to reinforce the palm rest, that part of the laptop constantly getting scuffed up by watches, bracelets and those pesky high school class rings. Why glass, though? It's lightweight and tough, stays cool to the touch and plays nice with the NFC radio.

IT'S OBVIOUS HP CHOSE THIS MACHINE AS A GUINEA PIG FOR SOME BOLDER DESIGN CHOICES.

What HP's claiming, essentially, is that contrary to whatever you might have guessed, the glass actually makes the laptop *less* fragile, not more so. Whatever the ratio of materials (HP used magnesium, aluminum and plastic in the chassis), there isn't a hint of flex in the body. The glass-coated bits don't feel rugged, per se, but definitely resilient. Try rapping your fingers against the lid and palm rest if you see this thing on display at a store: that low-pitched *click* has a

reassuring ring to it. But reassuring of what, exactly? The laptop's durability? The quality of your \$1,400 investment? We'll let you be the judge.

As singular as the Spectre is, though, it isn't so experimental that it would look out of place in an Envy family photo. That glowing logo on the lid is still there, and that conspicuous Beats branding should seem familiar, right down to the analog volume dial. The metal chassis also looks more or less the same, even though the Spectre doesn't share the same unibody construction as its big brothers. You may also notice the Spectre's mag-alloy body has a slicker feel than the Envy 15. That's not a bad thing, especially since those smooth surfaces seem impervious to scratches. All told, the design is arresting and well-thought-out — lovely, even. If you've been wondering why you should choose this over HP's budget Ultrabook, the Folio 13, you're looking at most of the reasons right here.

When the Spectre was first announced, most of the Ultrabooks we'd seen to date had 13-inch screens, and weighed almost a pound less. Indeed, compared to the ASUS Zenbook UX31, Toshiba Portege Z835 and HP's own Folio 13, it seems chubby at 3.97 pounds (1.8kg) / .79 inches (20.1mm) thick. Little did we know just how many plus-sized Ultrabooks were on the way. If Intel's estimate is right (and Intel should know a thing or two about Ultrabooks) half of the 75-plus models to be released this year will have 14- or 15-inch displays. Even in the



first few months of the year, we've seen models with optical drives and discrete graphics — PCs that feel more like good old-fashioned laptops than so-called Ultrabooks. And wouldn't you know? In that sub-class of 14-inch Ultrabooks, the Spectre is on par with the 3.95-pound Samsung Series 5 and ThinkPad T430u, which weighs in at “under four pounds,” according to Lenovo.

Unlike the Series 5, the Spectre doesn't

make room for an optical drive. Instead, that right edge where you might expect to find it is home to a sparse collection of ports and buttons, including a power socket, volume dial, mute button and Beats Audio launch key. With no ports on the front or back sides either, that doesn't leave much room for all the other sockets HP managed to squeeze in. Indeed, you'll find those packed in along the left side, with a DisplayPort,

HDMI socket, Ethernet jack, two USB 3.0 ports and a headphone jack sitting in a row. (There's also an SD / MMC reader tucked in there, toward the front edge.)

Although the machine feels thicker than other Ultrabooks, it's clear HP couldn't have made it any skinnier — not if it wanted to keep that Ethernet jack, anyway. Look closely and you'll see there's no room to spare either above or below that jack, suggesting this port represented one of the bigger limiting factors in terms of thickness. We can't speak for any of you, but if it's a choice between an Ethernet jack and a slightly thinner chassis, we'll pick the wired connection every time.

NFC

The Spectre has an NFC radio built into the left side of the palm rest, but you wouldn't know it from reading HP's website: the laptop's product page makes no mention of this feature. Indeed, company officials have described this addition as "experimental," which is fair since you can't actually *do* much with it right now, save for transferring URLs from your phone to your desktop.

To get started, you'll need an Android phone with NFC, along with the free Touch to Share app, which actually has its roots in webOS. (Note: when you're searching for this in the Play Store, remember that Syncables, not HP, is listed as the developer. It's also best to search for "HP Touch to Share," since "touch to share" yields lots of irrelevant results.)

Once you download the app and make sure NFC and Android Beam are enabled, open the Touch to Share program installed on *your* PC. It's at this juncture that you'll go through with a one-time pairing process so that your PC recognizes your device. As you're doing this, make sure you place the phone length-wise across the palm rest, parallel to the keyboard. Thereafter, you can just run that mobile Touch to Share app in the background on your phone when you want to share pages. Eventually, we got this to work with our Verizon Wireless Galaxy Nexus, but the webpage transfers are still very unreliable in this early stage.

Etc.

Lest you think HP is simply trying to woo you with a striking design, the company's also using the rest of the in-the-box goodies to help justify that \$1,400-plus price. For starters, we appreciate that the slim power brick fully detaches from its two accompanying cables — a setup that makes the adapter that much easier to stow away. Additionally, HP threw in a neoprene sleeve that wraps snugly around the Spectre. Nothing fancy, but it's much appreciated nonetheless.

Keyboard

With the Envy 15, HP didn't skimp on the cushy keys, and we're happy to report it's more of the same in this shrunken-down model. Here, too, the keys offer plenty of travel, though they occasionally fail to register indi-



vidual letters, a nuisance that'll force you to go back and re-type them. On the other hand, they're well spaced and we ultimately managed to type the brunt of this review on it without too much fuss. In fact, as we spent more time with the Spectre we noticed fewer spelling mistakes, which suggests you just might have to conquer a learning curve before you find your typing mojo. In the grand scheme of things, with so many Ultrabooks rocking shallow keyboards, the Spectre offers one of the better typing experiences we've enjoyed on a laptop this size, though you'll still find equally tactile keys on the Folio 13, Dell XPS 13 and MacBook Air.

HP'S ATTENTION TO AESTHETIC DETAIL DOESN'T PAY OFF WITH A SMOOTH TRACKPAD EXPERIENCE.

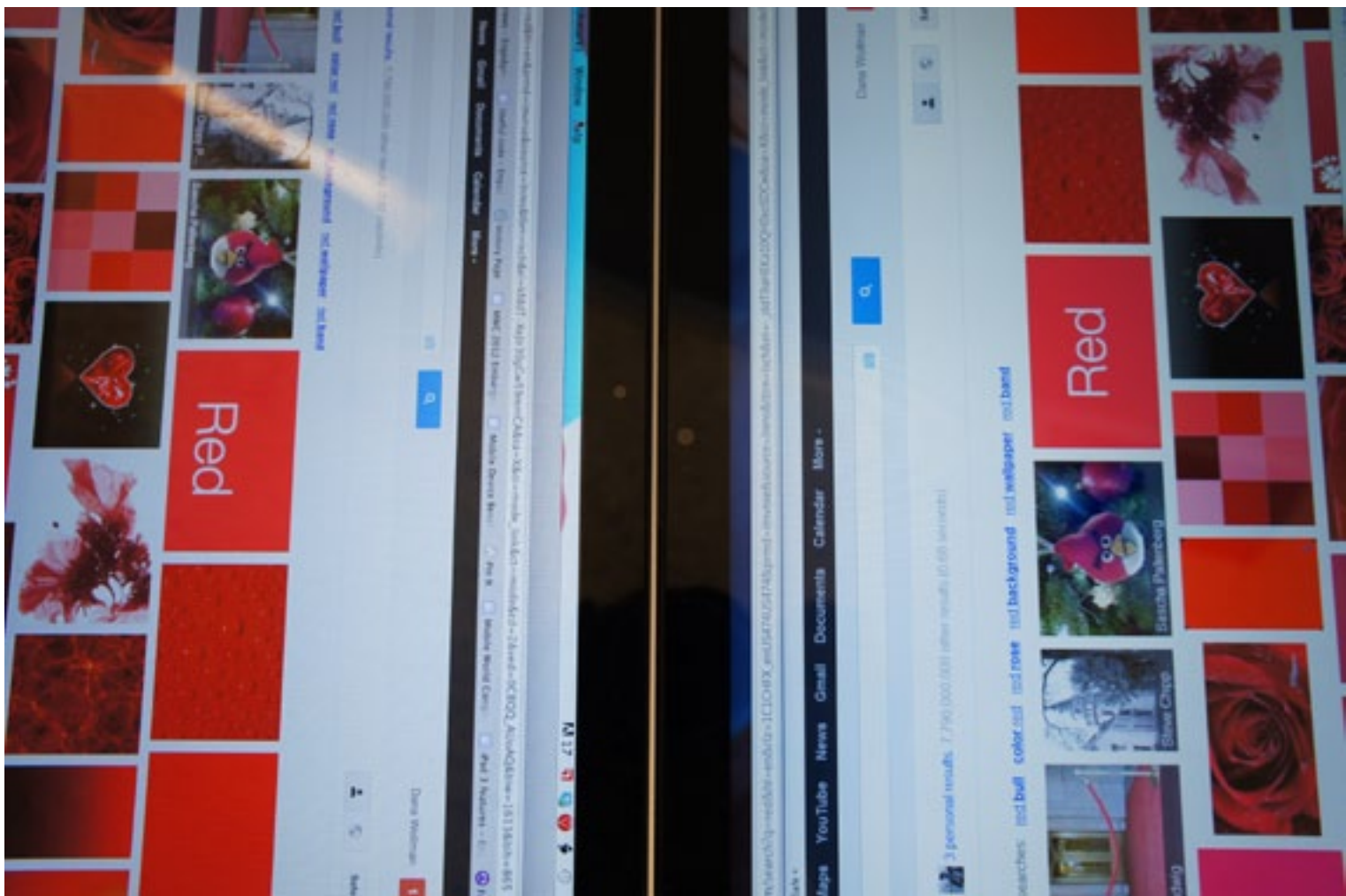
You'll notice there's a good deal of similarity between this keyboard and the Folio 13's, whose arrow keys leave more room for the left / right keys than the up / down ones. It's a bit of a letdown to see those arrows are still cramped, but then again, the Spectre's footprint isn't much

wider than the 13-inch Folio's. For what it's worth, you shouldn't have too much of a problem feeling around for them when you want to highlight text using the 'ol keyboard.

With a starting price of \$1,400, it shouldn't be a shocker that the Spectre sports a backlit keyboard. As with the other Envy laptops, HP stuck an LED underneath each keycap — a design choice intended to enhance the glow and also reduce light leakage from beneath the keys. Friends, the effect is lovely: the keys do indeed shine brighter than what you'll find on competing laptops, and the lack of a halo effect makes for a cleaner-looking panel. If you want to save battery life, you can press F5 to deactivate it, in which case everything but that function key will go dark. Speaking of the sort, that top row is home to most every control you can think of, save for volume (display brightness, etc.) and you don't need to press the "fn" button with your other hand to use them.

Trackpad

Based on conversations with company reps, it's obvious HP took great pains to design the trackpad. Unfortunately, their attention to aesthetic detail doesn't pay off with a smooth experience. Since the outfit already committed to decking out the palm rest in glass, it had to follow up with a glass touchpad. And though it went out of its way to use a different kind of glass on the Synaptics-powered pad, that surface still presents



too much friction, even when it comes to rote gestures like dragging the cursor across the screen.

With two-finger scrolling as well, you'll have to apply a little extra pressure, and move your fingers up and down very deliberately. With pinch-to-zoom, though, we actually found the pad to be a little oversensitive, making it all too easy to zoom in when we didn't mean to. Other times, when we were actively trying to adjust the size of the text, we had a heck of a time scaling to size in modest increments. Worst of all, the button mechanism inside the clickpad feels stiff — a complaint we had about the Folio 13, too.

As with the Folio 13, there's an icon in the upper left corner of the trackpad that you can double-tap to disable the

pad altogether. Once you do that, you'll know the touchpad's turned off because an icon will flash onscreen and a small LED light next to the trackpad will glow orange until you enable the pad again.

Display

We've got a few rounds of good news to share here, so let's dive right in. First off, the Spectre is blessed with a 14-inch, edge-to-edge display whose 1600 x 900 pixel count bests the 1366 x 768 resolution you'll find on most other Ultrabooks. Though HP says this isn't an IPS display, technically speaking, it nonetheless offers wider viewing angles than a run-of-the-mill TN panel. Watch from the side or with the lid dipped forward, and those vibrant colors hold their own. Within reason, the screen

won't get washed-out, and the contrast levels shouldn't get too severe. If anything, your biggest obstacle might be that super reflective finish.

So far, so unsurprising. We had similar things to say about the 1080p Radiance panel crowning the Envy 15. One thing soured that, though, and that was some imprecise color calibration — a flaw that caused reds to appear orange, and purples to take on a bluish tint. Given that all these displays fall under the Radiance umbrella, we resigned ourselves to another heaping dose of red-orange. Interestingly, though, when we lined it up against the MacBook Pro, the colors seemed more evenly rendered. Turns out, our eyes weren't deceiving us: HP's product managers confirmed the Spectre's display has a richer color gamut than the Envy 15's (it is, however, comparable to the Envy 17, they say). It's too bad, then, that HP couldn't have used a larger version of that screen in the Envy 15. As it is, disgruntled Envy 15 owners will have to settle for a forthcoming tuning utility and hope for the best.

Finally, the Spectre packs Intel Wireless Display, which allows you to mirror your desktop on and stream 1080p to a television or external monitor. Though Best Buy sometimes sells laptops bundled with a compatible adapter, you'll have to bring your own, to the tune of about \$100. We've tested this before, so here's our one-sentence summary: the setup is consistently fast and easy,



and the streaming is fluid.

Sound

Say what you will about Beats being a gimmick (heck, we've written thousands of words on the subject), but the audio here is some of the best you'll enjoy on a laptop, particularly an Ultrabook, where robust sound typically falls by the wayside. The speakers are loud, as you'd expect, but in particular, we found the audio doesn't get distorted, even when you crank the volume to the max. And though Beats has been tailored to make the best of thumping bass notes, it also handles other sounds, such as classical strings, quite nicely. All in all, a top-notch musical experience, right up there with the Bang & Olufsen speakers on the Zenbook UX31.

THE AUDIO IS SOME OF THE BEST YOU'LL ENJOY ON A LAPTOP, PARTICULARLY AN ULTRABOOK, WHERE ROBUST SOUND TYPICALLY FALLS BY THE WAYSIDE.

By default, you still need to push the dial up to lower the volume, but if this

BENCHMARK	PCMARK VANTAGE	3DMARK06
HP Envy 14 Spectre (1.6GHz Core i5-2467M, Intel HD Graphics 3000)	9,335	3,468
Dell XPS 13 (1.6GHz Core i5-2467M, Intel HD Graphics 3000)	N/A	4,130
HP Folio 13 (1.6GHz Core i5-2467M, Intel HD Graphics 3000)	6,701	3,387
Toshiba Portege Z835 (1.4GHz Core i3-2367M, Intel HD Graphics 3000)	5,894	3,601
Lenovo IdeaPad U300s (1.8GHz Core i7-2677M, Intel HD Graphics 3000)	9,939	3,651
SUS Zenbook UX31 (1.7GHz Core i5-2557M, Intel HD Graphics 3000)	10,508	4,209
Acer Aspire S3 (1.6GHz Core i5-2467M, Intel HD Graphics 3000)	5,367	3,221
13-inch, 2011 MacBook Air (1.7GHz Core i5-2557M, Intel HD Graphics 3000)	9,484	4,223
2011 Samsung Series 9 (1.7GHz Core i5-2537M, Intel HD Graphics 3000)	7,582	2,240

Notes: the higher the score the better.

feels unintuitive, just press the Beats key on the right side of the laptop, go into advanced settings in the onscreen Beats console and program the dial to work the opposite way. While you're there, you can adjust the master volume or tweak it for certain outlets, such as the speaker. You can also select from different Beats EQ profiles (music, movies or 3D content), or adjust the sound properties manually. Hey, you can even turn off Beats altogether, at which point that light-up "b" on the palm rest ceases to glow red.

Like the rest of the Envy family, the Spectre has HP Wireless Audio built in, which means you can wirelessly stream tracks to as many as four KleeNet-powered speakers. Alas, though, we didn't

test this feature, as we happen not to have any KleeNet equipment lying around.

Performance

If benchmarks are any indication, the Spectre isn't the fastest Ultrabook on the planet, but it holds its own against some stiff competition. Its PCMark Vantage score of 9,335 puts it in the same neighborhood as a Core i7-powered IdeaPad U300s, along with the similarly specced MacBook Air. (Curiously, the Spectre scored 2,600 points higher than the Folio 13, which has the same CPU, graphics card and 4GB of RAM.) In the disk benchmark ATTO, meanwhile, the Samsung-made solid-state drive delivered top read speeds of 232 MB/s, with

writes maxing out at 187 MB/s — almost exactly what we got from the Samsung SSD inside the Folio 13. That’s also in the same ballpark as the U300s, which notched 250 MB/s reads and 200 MB/s writes. Of course, none of these amateurs can match the ASUS Zenbook UX31, which managed read / write speeds of 550 / 500 MB/s, respectively.

The Spectre notched a score of 3,468 in the graphics benchmark 3DMark06. That’s around 700 to 800 points less than what the Dell XPS 13, MacBook Air and UX31 scored, though at the end of the day, panning an Ultrabook for a lackluster 3DMark06 score is a bit fruitless. After all, they all have the same watered-down Intel HD 3000 graphics card. So just how serviceable is it? If you haven’t graduated from crudely drawn games like *The Sims*, you should enjoy

65fps frame rates, though attempt *Call of Duty 4* and you’ll want to quit within the first minute, thanks to the sluggish 15fps gameplay (and that’s at 1024 x 768 resolution, mind you!).

Booting into Windows takes 23 seconds, which is reasonable, though not quite as fast as the UX31 (16 seconds), IdeaPad U300s (18 seconds), Folio 13 (18 seconds) or the MacBook Air (15 seconds). The machine takes a sluggish nine seconds to resume, compared with two for the UX31. As you should be well convinced by now, a machine with these specs (namely, a 1.6GHz Core i5-2467M processor, 4GB of RAM and a 128GB SSD) is more than powerful enough to use as an everyday machine — assuming your everyday tasks consist of email, web surfing, chat, word processing, video streaming, basic photo editing and some light gaming. Yours truly easily spent a leisurely evening writing this very review — with a healthy dose of web browsing, YouTube and Grooveshark thrown in for variety’s sake. If anything, that stiff, flaky clickpad is the most likely thing to slow you down.

Though the Spectre makes use of HP’s CoolSense technology, we noticed the machine gets a bit warm on the bottom side, even if you’re just goofing around in Chrome. Still, those slightly warmer temperatures never registered as uncomfortable.

Battery Life

Though the Spectre’s five-and-a-half-hour battery life is a big improvement

LAPTOP	BATTERY LIFE
HP Envy 14 Spectre	5:30
HP Folio 13	6:08
Toshiba Portege Z835	5:49
ASUS Zenbook UX31	5:41
13-inch, 2011 MacBook Air	5:32 (Mac OS X) 4:12 (Windows)
Lenovo IdeaPad U300s	5:08
Dell XPS 13	4:58
Samsung Series 9	4:20
Acer Aspire S3	4:11

over its predecessor's four-hour runtime, it's about 40 minutes short of what you'd get with the \$800 Folio 13. Still, the Spectre's performance is average compared with other Ultrabooks. (Really, take a look at our battery run-down test: the Spectre bests four laptops, and loses to just as many.) If you do as we did, and loop a movie off the local disk with WiFi on and the screen brightness fixed at 65 percent, the four-cell battery should last about as long as both the MacBook Air and UX31. We found, though, that if you select the default "HP Recommended" power settings and stick to web surfing, the runtime stretches to about six hours. That's just half an hour more, but if you're scrambling to wrap up that last paragraph at a trade show where there are no outlets in sight (what? who's projecting?), every minute counts.

Software

Like the Folio 13, the Spectre comes with full complimentary versions of Adobe Photoshop Elements 10 and Premiere Elements 10 — two apps we actually don't mind PC makers tossing in without our permission. Other staples include Microsoft Office 2010 Starter Edition and a two-year subscription (not trial, but subscription) to Norton Internet Security. Now it's true, Norton's pop-ups sometimes got the better of us when we first booted into Windows, but we appreciate getting something for nothing, and we can also respect HP for refusing to saddle



its high-end Envy laptops with trialware. Now, if only it would be so generous with its Pavilion customers...

Actually, before we get knee-deep in congratulations, we'll say this: HP *clearly* isn't counting its own pre-installed utilities as bloatware. As with other machines in HP's stable, you'll find apps like Power Manager. Some of these apps, like MovieStore, stay invisible as long as you want them to, though Support Assistant in particular has a nasty habit of interrupting you while you're trying to get work done.

Configuration Options and Warranty

The configuration we took for a spin is the entry-level \$1,400 model, which comes with a 1.6GHz Core i5-2467M processor, 4GB of RAM, Intel HD 3000 graphics and a 128GB SSD. As



The Competition

Given that, this might be a good time to ask, if this is a premium laptop, what's justifying that premium price? It's certainly not the performance or battery life, which aren't any more impressive than what the competition's capable of.

with most other Ultrabooks, there's an optional i7 CPU (the 2677M, for \$200) as well as a 256GB SSD (\$300). You can't order more RAM through HP, however, and though some other 14-inch Ultrabooks will include discrete graphics, the Spectre is only available with that integrated Intel card. In case you're wondering, the battery, memory and SSD are not designed to be user-replaceable (you could replace the 1,000-cycle battery yourself using a screwdriver, but HP doesn't condone it).

It's worth noting, too, that this \$1,400 starting price includes a standard two-year warranty — a given across the Envy lineup, but a welcome surprise compared to most other PCs, which generally come with one year of protection. Particularly when you consider Dell charges \$187 to extend a one-year warranty to two, the Spectre's price tag stings a little less. But only a little: even if this were a \$1,200 machine with a one-year warranty, it would *still* be more expensive than similarly specced Ultrabooks (that IPS-quality display notwithstanding).

It's not any special attention to ergonomics, with the trackpad being as stiff and jumpy as it is. The \$1,100 ASUS Zenbook UX31 performs better for \$300 less and has a rigid, spun-metal design that gives the Spectre's glass-and-metal casing a run for its money. The same can be said of the \$1,300 MacBook Air, which also adds a comfortable keyboard-and-mouse combo — something the UX31 and other Windows-based Ultrabooks haven't gotten right yet.

The most likely reason you'd choose the Spectre is that display, which matches the 1600 x 900 resolution found in the UX31, but does it one better with richer colors, wider viewing angles and some seriously narrow bezels. Truly, there's nothing else like it — at least not in the Ultrabook category. You'll be lucky if you get resolution higher than 1366 x 768, much less a panel that *isn't* a garden-variety TN screen.

The Spectre also wins points for its bold design, but is that reflecting pond of a lid worth \$1,400? Do those glass bits and enhance the experience, or are


they just gimmicks? Suffice to say, we remain skeptical on both counts.

Wrap-Up

On its own, the Envy 14 Spectre is a nice laptop. And we mean that in the most superficial way: this is one of the loveliest, most memorable machines we've tested recently, and its 1600 x 900 display is unparalleled — at least in the Ultrabook category, where it's slim pickings for high-quality screens.

The problem is the price. We're not saying that \$1,400 cost of entry makes the laptop any less of a solid product, but we're coming up short on reasons why you would choose this over a \$1,100 ASUS Zenbook UX31, or even a \$1,300 MacBook Air. Those are two beautiful, finely crafted options right there, and let's not discount the \$1,000 Dell XPS 13 and \$1,200 Lenovo IdeaPad U300s. We love these for their looks too, even if they are safer than the Spectre's glass-and-metal show. And while the Spectre's 1600 x 900 screen is a delight, the UX31 offers the same resolution for hundreds of dollars less. Most importantly, perhaps, the Spectre doesn't perform any better than less expensive Ultrabooks, packing similar (or identical) components. Worse, it's saddled with a stiff clickpad — something that can't be remedied with a quick driver update.

Given those demerits, the Spectre's biggest distinguishing features are its stunning display, two-year warranty, complimentary software, Beats Audio,

limited NFC capability (a gimmick) and its glass design (another gimmick, but a damn gorgeous one). Unless you're a diehard display aficionado, the Envy 14 is a bit overpriced for what it is, even if it is a pleasure to use. 

Dana Wollman is Reviews Editor at Engadget, a marathoner, lover of puns and a native Brooklynite.

BOTTOMLINE

HP Envy 14 Spectre

\$1,400+

PROS

- Striking glass-and-metal design
- Vibrant 1600 x 900 display
- Stellar audio quality
- Two-year warranty
- Generous software package

CONS

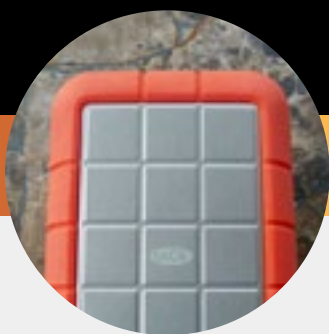
- Stiff, flaky trackpad
- Expensive compared to similarly performing Ultrabooks

The Spectre looks the part of a premium Ultrabook, but its average performance and stiff touchpad don't fully justify the high starting price.

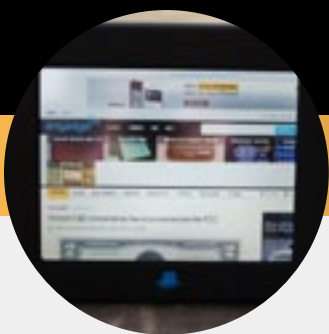
>> IN REAL LIFE

Welcome to IRL, an ongoing feature where we talk about the gadgets, apps and toys we're using in real life and take a second look at products that already got the formal review treatment.

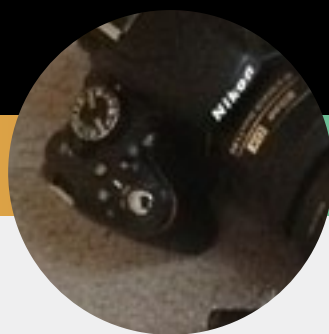
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LaCie Rugged Triple USB 3.0, Chumby 8, and a Duo of Nikkor Lenses

BY ENGADGET STAFF

You know what we're sick of talking about? (Okay, sick is a strong word, but you catch our drift.) Phones. Also, the iPad. Fortunately, this week's IRL touches on neither of the above. Instead, our audio guy Joe takes a different tack and explains his choice of Nikkor lenses, while Andy and Billy get hands-on with a rugged hard drive and Chumby 8, respectively. Head on to see how we rate this stuff after spending more than a little time with all of it.

LaCie Rugged Triple USB 3.0

I'm a big fan of keeping my virtual desktop squeaky clean, along with the totality of my Mac's 500GB HDD. Nothing makes camp in my hard drive that doesn't need to be there at all times. OCD much? Yes. Although you couldn't tell by the infestation of Wendy's wrappers and half-opened mail in my car, organization is my lifeline. Unfortunately, then, the 300-plus gigabytes of all my favorite DVDs and other space-eaters didn't make the cut. To ease my obses-



sive mind — and also watch movies on the go — I bought a 500GB, 5,400RPM LaCie Rugged external hard disk.

Noting the bright orange appeal, I bought the Rugged because I'm very rough on my gear, and indeed, it's so far held up. With internal rubber bumpers and a protective anti-scratch aluminum shell, it conforms to 810-F military standards. I use several external hard drives for various things, but the Rugged houses my most frequently used files. It's got two Firewire 800 ports (which comes in handy with my Mac), as well as USB 3.0 for when I'm hopping on a friend's PC — just make

sure you don't lose the USB cable that comes with it. The top transfer rate of 5Gbps is pretty decent; however, I wasn't too impressed with the tempermental security software, which I promptly removed. The Rugged isn't lightning-proof, but if you're an active person prone to dropping, chopping and stomping, this might be the external drive for you. —*Andy Bowen*

Chumby 8

What can I say? Some of us fell for the little guy. The app ecosystem showed promise and the hardware was a vast improvement over previous models.

Unfortunately, the Chumby 8 comes up empty in a lot of areas. Perhaps the most glaring flaw for me is the touchscreen. Using its product manual as a warning, the company's quick to inform users this here screen is no iPad display — a distinction that should be obvious after just a few minutes of use. Swipe navigation is quite the adventure, especially when you're browsing the web. Being the stickler for clean, crisp typography that I am, reading more than a few lines of jagged type became more of a chore than I wanted it to. The 8 doesn't have battery capabilities either, so I have to stay a cord's distance from an outlet whenever I want to use it.

Some of the apps are neat, I must admit. I even got excited when I saw Netflix. But my hopes were quickly dashed when upon downloading it I realized I could only browse titles and edit my queue. Others, like ESPN, offer a few lines of a story and then a link to the main site — again, pretty frustrating. Honestly, you're best leaving this one to the Chumby faithful. Sure, this could be a great device for those who know exactly what they're getting and dig the outfit's previous offerings. But



for me, it amounts to little more than a digital picture frame I can use to stream Pandora. And for that, I'll stick with a tablet. —*Billy Steele*

Nikkor AF-S 35mm DX f/1.8G Prime Lens

When it comes to interchangeable lens cameras, the Engadget crew uses everything from the venerable NEX-C3 to beasts like the Nikon D3S. One aspect that's rarely brought to light, however, are the lenses we actually throw on them. Lately, I've relied on a Nikon D5100, mainly because it's a swell performer in dimly lit situations, thanks to its 16.2-megapixel APS-C sensor (the same one you'll find on the larger D7000). While I do have a number of opinions about this DSLR, I've always been happy with the selection in Nikon's DX range of lenses.

For years, I've used a trusty Nikkor AF-S 35mm DX f/1.8G prime lens (52.5mm full-frame equivalent) — the same one Don referred to in his D90



IRL. In short, it's compact, fast and able to capture sharp focus on images with a smooth background blur. Better yet, at \$200 it's far from a wallet-thinner in the world of camera optics. Despite my admiration for this lens, it keeps me far from the detailed bits when it comes time to take extreme close-up shots. That's where my Nikkor AF-S 40mm DX Micro f/2.8G (60mm full-frame equivalent) comes in. It gives me simi-

lar results as the 35mm with the added benefit of macro, and it's got a fairly reasonable \$275 street price. It's not as fast to focus against the 35mm, but it's hardly slow either. I've only missed a few candid moments with it, usually because I've left it set for full-on close ups. This lens also isn't much bigger than the 35mm, and most importantly, neither takes up much space in my bag. —Joe Pollicino





BACK IN NOVEMBER, TANGO BECAME THE FIRST TO BRING VIDEO CALLING TO WINDOWS PHONES. NOW THE COMPANY'S **CO-FOUNDER AND CTO** REFLECTS ON AN OLD AMSTRAD AND GETTING LOST IN BEIJING.

ERIC SETTON

Q&A

What gadget do you depend on most?

My iPhone 4S, it's the first thing that I check in the morning and last thing I check in the evening. I cannot live without it.

Which gadget you look back upon most fondly?

I bought a second-hand Amstrad computer in 1989 that came with 40 games and ripping software. It was the first computer that could actually copy floppies easily and it would allow you to program in Basic. I loved it.

Which company does the most to push the industry?

It's cliché, but for me it's Apple. They recreated three industries already — the music industry, the phone industry, and the computing industry. I cannot wait to see what they will do with the TV.

What is your operating system of choice?

iOS, I spend much more time on my iPad and iPhone than on my computer.

What are your favorite gadget names?

Wii is a great name. I am also

excited about the Nokia Lumia phones coming to market. They chose a good name.

What are your least favorite?

T-Mobile Samsung Galaxy S Blaze 4G

Which app do you depend on most?

Tango of course! Having family abroad, it's the only way we stay in touch. I also use Twitter multiple times a day to stay on top of news and what's going on. I am also obsessed with monitoring services to stay up to date on Tango stats.

What traits do you most deplore in a smartphone?

Battery life, bad reception, clutter and bulk.

Which do you most admire?

Slickness, simple and beautiful UI and speed.

What is your idea of the perfect device?

It's a device that always knows what I want to do, makes my life easier, something that I can take everywhere, one that I never have to charge and one that never crashes.



A Blancpain Tourbillon. It's a watch that comes with complications that correct for gravity so your watch is always accurate. It's the equivalent of very fine jewelry for these mechanical watches that are extremely complicated to make.

What is your earliest gadget memory?

My dad had a really early Sharp computer and it had two or three lines of input. It was the size of a laptop but had the functionality of a calculator. He created a program that took hundreds of hours, which made a dog walk around the screen. It was really cool.

What device do you covet most?

ANSWER

What technological advancement do you most admire?

Definitely the internet, because it will be the most difficult thing for our kids to understand that it did not exist at one time.

Which do you most despise?

Banner ads

What fault are you most tolerant of in a gadget?

I would rather see something lack-

ing functionality than a product that lacks polish.

Which are you most intolerant of?

Sloppiness

When has your smartphone been of the most help?

I was lost in Beijing one of the first times I was there and it helped me find my way back to my hotel.

If you could change one thing about your phone what would it be?

I would want to personalize my phone to make it stand out and look unique.


What does being connected mean to you?

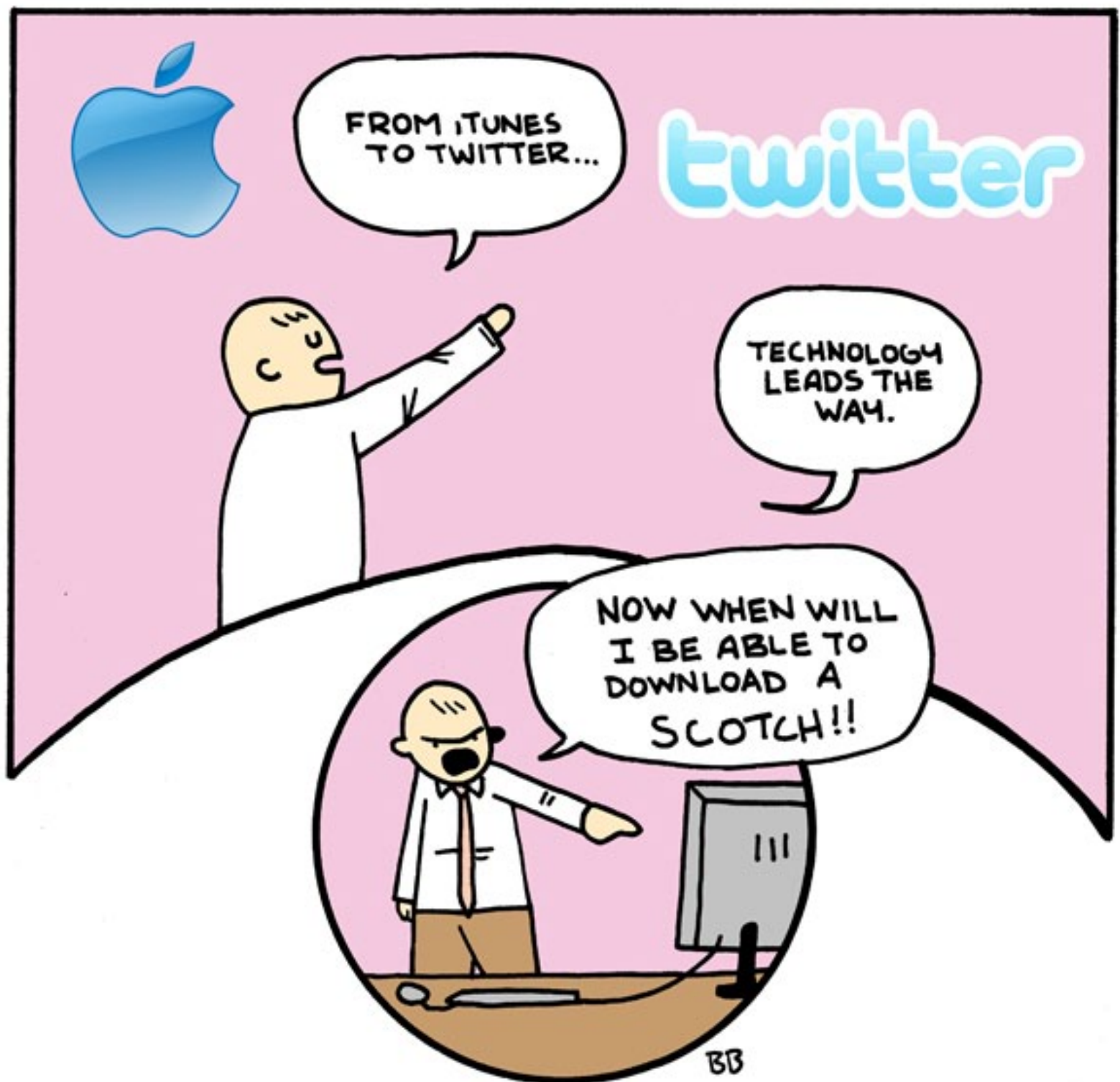
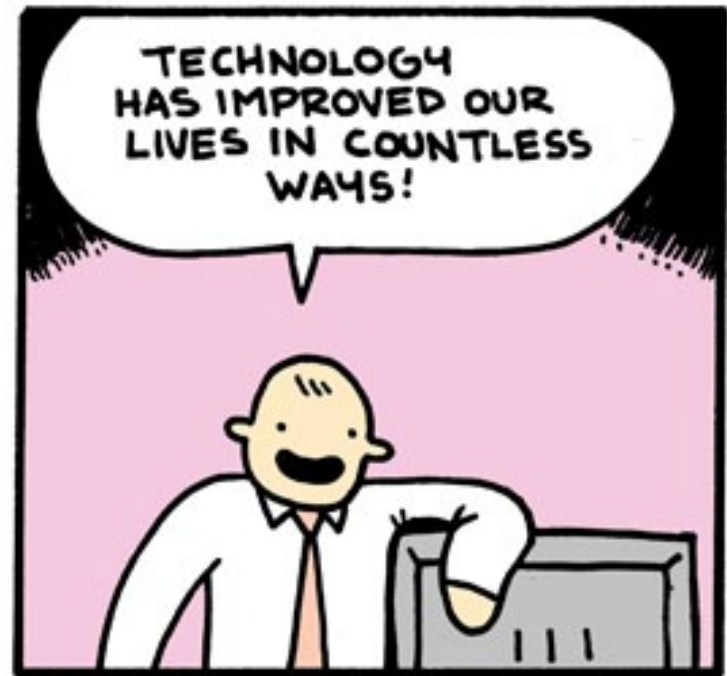
It means being reachable to the people that need to interact with me and that I need to interact with.

When are you least likely to reply to an email?

I answer most of the hundreds of emails I get a day, except from the random solicitations from people I do not know.

When did you last disconnect?

When did the Internet get started? 



The Last Word - Box Brown



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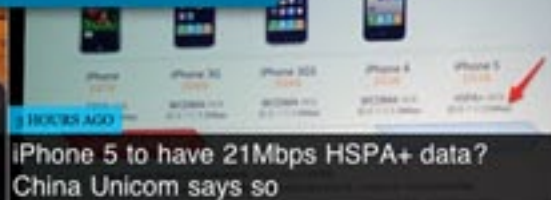
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IRL: Sony NEX-C3, Garmin Forerunner 110 and the Elgato Turbo.264 HD



iPhone 5 to have 21Mbps HSPA+ data? China Unicom says so



Dell confirms XPS 14z will go on sale in the US in the 'coming weeks'

Remember that XPS 14z Dell teased at IFA? Yeah, well, it's arriving soon. As in, "the coming weeks" soon. The company just confirmed it's on the cusp of shipping here in the states, and while the outfit stopped short of giving a starting price, it's good and ready to talk specs. As we reported last month, it has the same industri...

By Dana Wollman September 29, 2011 12:35PM



iPhone 5 cases and realistic unibody dummy show off incredible slimness

While we're only five days away from finding out the true appearance of the next-generation iPhone, our good friends over at BENM.AT went ahead and crafted their very own unibody dummy using CAD drawings, CNC tools and a block of aluminum -- seriously, that's how they roll! Granted, this work's only based on...

By Richard Lai September 29, 2011 12:13PM



Kobo's Vox Android tablet appears online briefly, gets Canadian release date and pricing

A day after another little-known e-reader manufacturer announced a tablet, a new Android slate from Kobo made a brief online appearance on Future Shop's site, only to be quickly taken down. According to the Canadian retailer, the FCC-approved tablet will offer up a 7-inch display with a 1024 x 600 resolution, WiF...

By Brian Heater September 29, 2011 11:53AM



Iceland gets a data center to call its own, still believes in fairies

You say Iceland, we immediately think Eyjafjallajökull -- and no, we haven't had a narcoleptic collapse upon these very keys. It's been over a year since that volcano swept the headlines and interrupted air travel, providing outsiders with a skewed

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